



Go-betweens

AND THE

Colonization

OF

Brazil

2

1500-1600

ALIDA C. METCALF

Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil



ALIDA C. METCALF



Go-betweens

AND THE

Colonization

OF

Brazil



1500–1600



Copyright © 2005 by the University of Texas Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

First edition, 2005

Requests for permission to reproduce
material from this work should be sent to

Permissions

University of Texas Press

P.O. Box 7819

Austin, TX 78713-7819

www.utexas.edu/utpress/about/bpermission.html

Ⓢ The paper used in this book meets
the minimum requirements of
ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R1997)
(Permanence of Paper).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Metcalf, Alida C., 1954–

Go-betweens and the colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600 / Alida C. Metcalf. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-292-70970-6 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-292-71276-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Brazil—Colonization. 2. Brazil—History—16th century. 3. Indians of South
America—Brazil—First contact with Europeans. 4. Conquerors—Portugal—History—
16th century. 5. Conquerors—Brazil—History—16th century. I. Title.

F2526.M48 2005

981'.032—dc22

2005020020

For Daniel, Matthew, and Benjamin Rigney

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Contents

ix A NOTE ON SPELLING
AND CITATIONxi ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. Go-betweens	1
2. Encounter	17
3. Possession	55
4. Conversion	89
5. Biology	119
6. Slavery	157
7. Resistance	195
8. Power	235

275 NOTES335 BIBLIOGRAPHY363 INDEX

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

A Note on Spelling and Citation

MANY OF THE sources on which this book is based are written in archaic Portuguese. Following the custom adopted by Brazilian historians, I have modernized the spelling of most places, names, and words in the text, preserving the original Portuguese only in the titles of publications. I have also modernized the few English, French, and Spanish quotations in the text. The sources for direct quotations, information, and the work of scholars generally appear in combined endnotes at the end of each paragraph. When possible, for the convenience of interested readers, published documents are cited rather than the originals in archives.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK BEGAN in the archives of the Portuguese Inquisition when I read for the first time the confession of a half-Portuguese, half-Indian man who made his living moving back and forth between the Indian and Portuguese worlds of sixteenth-century Brazil. Preserved within the formulaic language used by the Lisbon Inquisition lay the vivid details of a life so compelling and so remote that it seemed I was reading fiction. This story reminded me of a novel I had once read, *The Go-Between*, which begins with the unforgettable statement: “The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.” Novelist L. P. Hartley then employs his main character, a go-between, to re-create a lost time for his readers. As I thought about the life revealed in the confession, I began to see that go-betweens held keys to understanding certain historical processes, such as the formation of colonial societies. In this book I use go-betweens as a lens through which the sixteenth-century Portuguese colonization of Brazil can be understood.

I am most grateful to many colleagues and friends who encouraged me in my initial ventures into a new field; without their support I would never have been able to write this book. Four colloquia on colonial Brazilian history, hosted by Professor Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva in Lisbon, were crucial to the early years of my research. To Maria Beatriz, and to all my colloquia colleagues, I am more grateful than I can fully express. Leila Agranti, Ângela Domingues, Márcia Graf, Richard Graham, Donald Higgs, Mary Karasch, Sandra Lauderdale Graham, Laura de Mello e Sousa, Lúcia Maria Bastos P. Neves, Guilherme Pereira das Neves, Donald Ramos, John Russell-Wood, Barbara Sommer,

James Wadsworth, and many others were kind enough to listen to my papers and to suggest directions for this work.

In addition to the Lisbon colloquia, I am grateful to many colleagues in Latin American and Brazilian history who organized sessions at professional meetings that provided me with a forum to develop the ideas expressed in this book. Among these, I especially thank Eni de Mesquita Samara, Laura Graham, Mary Karasch, Barbara Sommer, Hal Langfur, Judy Bieber, Barbara Ganson, John Russell-Wood, and John Monteiro. Tom McCoog, S.J., encouraged my research into the sixteenth-century Jesuits. My research into the Santidade de Jaguaripe religious movement appeared as part of an AHR Forum on the Millennium in the *American Historical Review* in 1999; I am most grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Very early in my research Robert Rowland allowed me to consult the unpublished Gulbenkian Inquisition Database (1987) of the sixteenth-century trials of the Lisbon Inquisition, which gave this project life. Ronaldo Vainfas has also been a most generous colleague who has helped me to understand the Santidade de Jaguaripe millenarian movement. Sandra Lauderdale and Richard Graham copied a crucial letter for me from the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro when it was impossible for me to travel there. Donald Higgs and Ernst Pijning obtained for me a microfilm copy of the trial of Fernão Cabral de Taíde from the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo in Lisbon. Stuart Schwartz steered me to the Monumenta Brasiliae collection of Jesuit letters early in my research and invited me to present a preliminary version of my go-between typology at a conference in memory of Charles Boxer at Yale University. On a memorable afternoon, Mary Ann Mahoney took me to the sixteenth-century church of Santana in Ilhéus, which vividly re-created for me the distant world I was so intensely studying.

At Trinity University I am fortunate to have the wisdom of extraordinary colleagues in many fields who have given me insights, directions, and ideas to explore. At a faculty research dinner hosted by Francisco García Treto in 1997, I benefited enormously from comments by Frank García, Gary Kates, Pablo Martínez, Meredith McGuire, Richard Reed, Linda Salvucci, Sussan Siavoshi, Carolyn Valone, and Colin Wells. At a second dinner, hosted by Sarah Burke in 2002, Sussan Siavoshi, Larry Kimmel, Arturo Madrid, John Martin, and Richard Reed again provided many insights that helped me to clarify my ideas. John Martin suggested important texts that have informed my work, and Joan Burton's enthusiastic comments on go-betweens in literature were exhilarating.

I owe a special debt to Colin Wells, to whom I turned for help with Latin texts, and whose comprehensive knowledge of the Mediterranean world I frequently challenged with obscure but important questions. Eve Duffy encouraged me to think more systematically about go-betweens and empire, and my colleague at St. Mary's University, Antonia Castañeda, helped me to understand the complex roles played by those who translate.

Students, particularly at Trinity University, have also helped me work through the ideas that underlie this book. I taught two first-year seminars to Trinity students on the topic of go-betweens in literature; these discussions were a fascinating foray into characters who played roles as cultural brokers, intermediaries, and translators. I thank my colleague Thomas Sebastian for suggesting novels that feature go-betweens, many of which I read with my students. Over the past year, students in my classes have read chapters of the book, and their comments have been very helpful. Graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin invited me to present a preliminary version of this book in the fall of 2001; their comments in particular helped me to conceptualize the fifth chapter, in which I explore go-betweens and biology.

Research trips funded by the Faculty Development Committee and by the Joullian Fund at Trinity University allowed me to work in archives in Lisbon, Rome, Vatican City, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador, as well as in major libraries in the United States. Thomas Cohen welcomed me to the Oliveira Lima Library in Washington, D.C.; the John Carter Brown Library in Providence provided the most exquisite collection of sixteenth-century editions of crucial texts that I have ever had the pleasure to read. The Newberry Library in Chicago provided a jump start for my discussion of mapmaking in the first chapter. I thank all the libraries and museums that granted me permission to reproduce the images that appear throughout the book.

This book took its final shape during an academic leave from Trinity University in 2001–2002, funded by Trinity's Faculty Leave Program and the National Endowment for the Humanities. This full year away from teaching allowed me to conceptualize this book in its present form. The chair of the History Department at Trinity University, John Martin, as well as former chairs Char Miller, Gary Kates, Allan Kownslar, and Terry Smart, facilitated many requests for travel and research expenses, and the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Fred Loxsom, generously agreed to underwrite the permissions and photography for the illustrations. David Stinchcomb advised me as I drew the maps. The librarians at Trinity, especially Craig Likeness, Carl Hanson, Chris

Nolan, Mary Cervantes Clark, and Maria McWilliams, all enriched this book in countless ways. In the History Department, I thank Eunice Herrington for her assistance with travel, reimbursements, and scanning, and Rosa Salinas for photocopying, entering data, and keeping track of interlibrary loans. A very talented Trinity student, Elizabeth Farfán, provided outstanding assistance in three languages in proofreading the bibliography and footnotes.

Theresa May has been a delight to work with at the University of Texas Press; I thank also Lynne Chapman, Nancy Bryan, Allison Faust, and especially Nancy Warrington for the care they have taken with the manuscript. I am especially grateful to my two anonymous outside readers, whose careful and painstaking reads of the first draft of this book allowed me to correct errors and to develop my ideas more fully.

Sometime in the writing of this book, I realized that my fascination with go-betweens emerges from my own childhood, when, as the daughter of a naval officer, I was uprooted and moved every two to three years. In particular, our life in Lima, Peru, in the late 1960s sparked my interest in Latin America. I thank my mother for making those years abroad rich with cultural experiences. I thank my father for introducing me to the world of sailing, the sea, and navigation. My sister and brothers shared with me the complexities of living in and moving between cultures. My sister Mary Clare's experience in the Ivory Coast as a Peace Corps Volunteer, and my two trips to visit her there, sparked my long-standing interest in West Africa.

It is a special pleasure to thank Daniel Rigney, who provided many sociological insights to this dyed-in-the-wool historian. It is to Dan, my companion in marriage, and to our two sons, Matthew and Benjamin, that this book is affectionately dedicated.

Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

1. *Go-betweens*

. . . her master asked her if she would be the third party . . .

A question posed to an Aimoré woman, 1609

In the first years of the seventeenth century, the French Jesuit historian Pierre du Jarric introduces an Indian woman living in Brazil in his history of the “most memorable things” in the lands “discovered by the Portuguese.” Leaving her unnamed, Jarric identifies her as a member of the Aimoré, an indigenous group greatly feared by colonists living in Salvador, Brazil’s capital. Jarric explains that she no longer lived with the Aimoré but on the estate of a prominent colonist who lived outside of Salvador, where the woman had become “domesticated” in the ways of the Portuguese and had learned their language and customs. Her master believed that she might be able to persuade the Aimoré to accept peace with the Portuguese. He sent her with Portuguese “accoutrements” (clothes), food, and “various iron tools” such as knives and hatchets, and through her native language, she convinced a group of Aimoré to accept the gifts and the peace offered by the Portuguese. Some of the Aimoré came to her master’s estate on the outskirts of the sugar plantation zone that surrounded the capital, and eventually an Aimoré chief met the governor of Brazil. He agreed that his people would live on an island in the Bay of All Saints, where the Jesuits would teach them Christianity. Jarric writes that a joyous procession was held in the capital to celebrate the peace.¹

A Jesuit report of their mission in Brazil in the first years of the seventeenth century, on which Jarric bases much of his account, reveals that the woman’s master asked her “if she would be the third party” and help to bring about a peace with the Aimoré. Because of her language, her mobility, and her understanding of two opposing cultures, this woman became the go-between who made pos-

sible peaceful encounters between two previously hostile groups. Her agency had enormous and far-reaching significance. The lives of the Aimoré whom she had persuaded to accept the Portuguese overtures for peace would never be the same, and the peace that she brought opened up opportunities for many in the Portuguese colony. But she was hardly unique. During the previous century, hundreds of similar encounters had already taken place, and certain ways of interaction between the Indian and the Portuguese worlds had already taken root in Brazil. She was part of a much larger process wherein go-betweens typically were present at meetings between Indian and Portuguese peoples. Many more go-betweens would facilitate future encounters in the succeeding centuries.

It has often been assumed that the contact between Europe and America was a dyadic relationship between two very different cultural groups, Europeans and Native Americans. But in these dealings, third parties, such as the Aimoré woman, invariably were present. Certainly, conceptualizing the Portuguese and Indian worlds as a dyadic relationship is key to understanding the conflict between two very different ways of life that competed for Brazil after 1500. But go-betweens, as third parties, influenced the relationship that emerged in fundamental ways. As sociologist Georg Simmel explains, “the triad is a structure completely different from the dyad,” and “[i]t is sociologically very significant that isolated elements are unified by their common relation to a phenomenon which lives outside of them.”² The Indian woman, speaking in the Aimoré language and giving presents of European clothes, food, and tools, was such a phenomenon. Through her, a very different relationship replaced the previously violent meetings that had characterized Portuguese and Aimoré interactions for at least fifty years. As go-between, she made possible a new kind of relationship between the Portuguese and the Aimoré, whether for better or for worse.

Go-betweens influenced the power dynamics at play in the relations between the Indian and European worlds. Simmel distinguishes between the mediator, who “guides the process of coming to terms,” and the arbitrator, who “ends up by taking sides.” For Simmel, mediators allow the two parties to determine the outcome of their conflict, whereas when the two sides choose an arbitrator, their “will to conciliation” is “personified in the arbitrator.” The arbitrator thereby gains “a special impressiveness and power over the antagonistic forces.” In historical settings, go-betweens can be neutral mediators, but in fact they rarely are. As a rule, they tend to become what Simmel calls arbitrators. In an encounter, the side that possesses the loyalty, or pays for (and retains) the allegiance, of the go-between gains an important advantage. There is a further dimension of

power, however. Go-betweens may exploit their positions for their own benefit. Simmel labels this position the *tertius gaudens* (the third who rejoices). The *tertius gaudens* is an “egoistic exploiter of the situation” who enjoys many advantages because he (or she) is indifferent to the outcome.³

The complexities of go-betweens have fascinated novelists, who use fiction to explore the social tensions, the psychological dramas, and the power shifts that surround them. In fiction, go-betweens are individuals of in-between social status who are mobile, able to function in very different worlds, frequently fluent in several languages, sometimes dabblers in magic, and oftentimes involved in intense, sexually charged situations. Not surprisingly, go-betweens in fiction frequently encounter tragedy. Celestina, the wily matchmaker in the Spanish novel *La Celestina*, pays the price of death for facilitating love, and Leo, the young carrier of messages in L. P. Hartley’s novel *The Go-Between*, suffers an emotional breakdown. Through the character of the hard-bitten spy Leamas, John Le Carré explores the complexities of manipulation, both by and of go-betweens, in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, as does African novelist Amadou Hampaté Bâ. Bâ’s character Wangrin brilliantly and craftily manipulates his role as translator to outwit the French colonial administrators in the novel *The Fortunes of Wangrin*. The go-between as agent of empire also emerges in J. M. Coetzee’s brooding novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which probes the power and the moral compass of the government official at the edge of the empire. Resistance to authority emerges in Jurek Becker’s character Jakob, who creates lies to bring hope to Jews in the ghetto controlled by the Nazis in *Jakob the Liar*. In all of these novels, go-betweens inhabit an “in-between” space, which gives them mobility, information, and power, but the stakes for them are always high. Go-betweens link groups or individuals who cannot communicate with each other, but the facilitation of that communication and contact inevitably leads to death, destruction, or madness.

Nearly all of these novels are set in recognizable historical periods that were times of conflict, contact, and change. Historians, too, have been fascinated by the go-betweens they have found in sources from the past. Some go-betweens have achieved near-mythical status in national and regional histories. Pocahontas, who lived at the same time as the unnamed Aimoré woman, is credited with bringing about peace between the English colony at Jamestown and the surrounding Powhatan people. Sacagawea (also spelled Sacajawea), a Shoshone woman who lived two hundred years later, is another individual go-between whose role as interpreter and guide is celebrated because she enabled Lewis and

Clark to explore the American Northwest. In the far west of nineteenth-century Brazil, Mary Karasch describes the life of a daughter of a prominent Caiapó chief who became the “Indian heroine of [the state of] Goiás.” Damiana da Cunha was baptized into Christianity, lived as a hostage in the household of the governor of Goiás to guarantee peace, and undertook multiple expeditions to the Caiapó to bring them into the Portuguese colonial world.⁴

Perhaps the most famous individual go-between is Malintzin, also known as Doña Marina or La Malinche, Hernán Cortés’ interpreter and mistress during the conquest of Mexico. Doña Marina was not the first interpreter to serve Cortés or the earlier captains who had sailed along the coast of the Yucatán, nor was she the last, but she is considered to be the most important. Baptized Indians, Indians captured in battle and freed on the condition that they carry messages, and even Spaniards who had gone “native” all served as translators for Cortés. Cortés immediately took advantage of Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Spaniard who had been shipwrecked among the Maya and who spoke Spanish and Mayan, and of Malintzin, later baptized as Marina, because she spoke Mayan and Nahuatl. As Doña Marina and Aguilar became experienced translators, they transformed the actual words of Cortés, which had limited power in Mexico because only Spaniards could understand them, into words and concepts that could be understood by Mayan and Nahuatl speakers. So ubiquitous was Doña Marina that Cortés, according to the Spanish foot soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo, actually became known throughout Mexico as “Malinche,” or Marina’s captain. For Díaz, who wrote his memoirs of the conquest late in his life, Doña Marina was a crucial part of the Spaniards’ success. He dedicates one chapter in his enormous account to her, stating at the end of the chapter, “I have wanted to declare this because without Doña Marina going with us, we could not understand the language of New Spain and Mexico.”⁵

Many visual representations of Doña Marina as interpreter are preserved in accounts of the conquest compiled from the perspective of Aztec survivors. A black-and-white line drawing of the encounter between Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, the ruler of the Aztecs, and Spanish conquistadors appears in the *Codex Florentino*, a source written by the Franciscan priest Bernardino de Sahagún. Based on the memories of Nahua informants whom Sahagún and his Indian students interviewed following the conquest of Mexico, the *Codex Florentino* emphasizes the role of Doña Marina in its drawings and in its Spanish and Nahuatl texts. This particular image shows Doña Marina standing between the Spanish and the Indian sides. She is drawn in the center, listening to the words of



Figure 1.1. Doña Marina interprets for Moctezuma and Cortés. Bernardino de Sahagún, *História general de las cosas de Nueva España Códice florentino* [Codex Florentino]. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

Moctezuma. Her feet are bare and her hands are folded across her stomach. She wears a woven *huipil* (tunic) and skirt. She is shown looking directly at Moctezuma, whose right hand is raised with the index finger pointing. Speech glyphs float from his mouth to Doña Marina. The pictograph clearly conveys that this encounter was not exclusively a dyadic relationship between the Spaniards and Moctezuma, but one facilitated by a third party, Doña Marina, through whom words passed (Fig. 1.1).⁶

Most go-betweens, however, have not become mythical figures in national histories, mainly because they have been overlooked or forgotten. When Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro met the Inca Atahualpa at Cajamarca, Indian translators were present. Nevertheless, this meeting in 1532 is frequently presented as a dyadic “clash of empires,” and the role of the interpreter is ignored.

Jared Diamond argues, for example, that not only does the meeting between Pizarro and Atahualpa mark “a decisive moment in the greatest collision of modern history,” but that “the factors that resulted in Pizarro’s seizing Atahualpa were essentially the same ones that determined the outcome of many similar collisions between colonizers and native peoples elsewhere in the modern world.”⁷

Yet, as historian James Lockhart notes, the Spaniards had excellent interpreters when they met Atahualpa; not only had they acquired the interpreters before they entered the Inca Empire, but their interpreters “had traversed most of the Hispanic world and had lived among Spaniards for some years of their adolescence.” Pedro Pizarro describes these interpreters as Indian boys, given to or captured by Pizarro and his partner Diego de Almagro on their previous reconnoitering expedition to the north coast of Peru. Two of the Indians were then taken to Spain before they accompanied Pizarro and Almagro to Peru.⁸

A remarkable history written by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala [Waman Puma], an Andean Indian of the seventeenth century, includes a visual representation of the meeting between Pizarro and Atahualpa that shows the presence of the interpreter. Guaman Poma places the interpreter in an intermediate space between Atahualpa and the conquistadors Diego de Almagro (who was not actually present), Francisco Pizarro, and the Franciscan priest, Fray Vicente. Atahualpa occupies the center and dominates the privileged upper position. Also in the upper position, to his right and left, are the Inca lords. Below him are the Spaniards.⁹ Almagro and Pizarro kneel, as does Fray Vicente, who holds a cross and a prayer book. To Vicente’s right, Atahualpa’s left, stands an interpreter with his index finger extended. Each of the conquistadors is so labeled, as is the interpreter: “Felipe *yn*° [*indio*, Indian] *lingua* [tongue]” (Fig. 1.2). The interpreter, Felipe, occupies an intermediate space between the Indian and the Spanish worlds.¹⁰

Guaman Poma’s visual rendering of the encounter between Pizarro and Atahualpa has its own logic, its own interpretation of events that had taken place many years before, and its own distortions. It is not my intent to read the image as a photograph of the meeting or to argue that it reflects exactly what transpired, but simply to note that it includes the presence of a third party, the interpreter.

Unlike the highly symbolic meetings at Cajamarca or at Tenochtitlan, most contacts between Europeans and Native Americans typically took place repeatedly over long periods of time, not only in frontier zones but in the daily encounters between Indians and European colonists. Modern historians of the

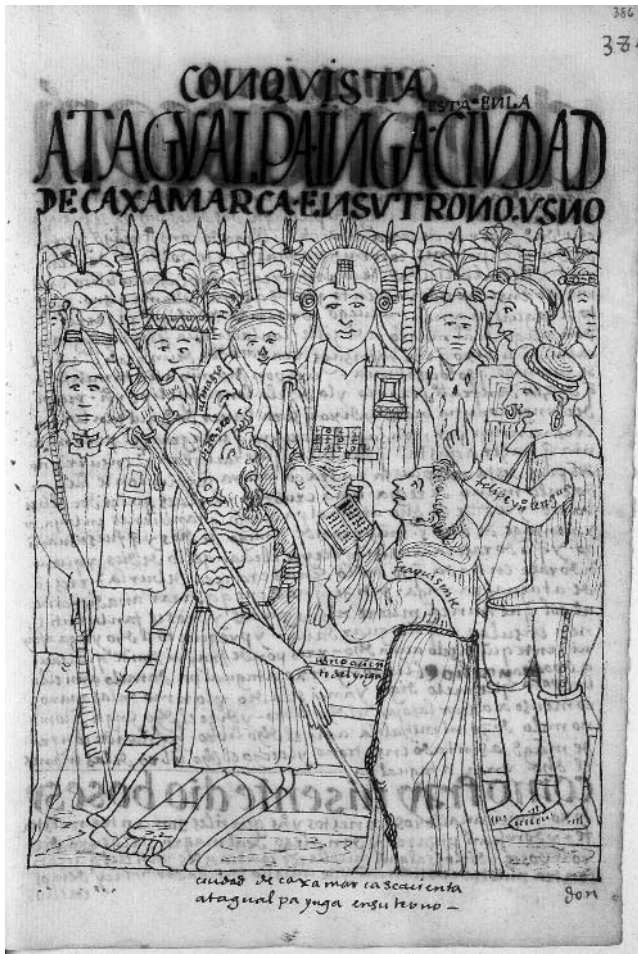


Figure 1.2. An interpreter (standing on right) translates for Atahualpa (center) and Pizarro (kneeling on left) at Cajamarca. Guaman Poma, *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* [1615], 386. The Royal Library, Copenhagen. Digitized version online at: <http://www.kb.dk/elib/mss/poma>.

Americas now recognize whole classes of intermediaries. Nancy Hagedorn, for example, identifies more than one hundred interpreters who served in the British territories north of Virginia between 1740 and 1770. These men and women were skilled translators and cultural brokers who were central to the formal diplomatic meetings between the Iroquois and British government officials. Janaína Amado and Timothy Coates emphasize the importance of the *degredado*, the penal exile, in the Portuguese Empire. Amado argues that Portugal, a small,

lightly populated Christian kingdom, could only achieve its ambitious overseas objectives by obsessively collecting information through all possible means. The Portuguese Crown therefore encouraged the creation of translators and intermediaries by sending condemned prisoners to live in exile in Africa, Asia, and Brazil. In Spanish America, mestizos, who inhabited the space between the Spanish and the Indian worlds, are frequently portrayed as important intermediaries. Berta Ares Queija sees the mestizos of sixteenth-century Peru as “condemned” to live between worlds, participating in both but belonging to neither. Their mobility, their ability to conduct themselves in two languages, and their skill at translating one symbolic universe to another were unique. Daniel Richter argues that Indian war captives, who were adopted into the Five Nation Iroquois villages in the seventeenth century, shaped the reception later received by Jesuit missionaries.¹¹

Go-betweens often inhabit what American historian Richard White terms a “middle ground.” White defines the middle ground as “in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world of villages.” This middle ground, he argues, is the periphery of the world system; it is “the area between the historical foreground of European invasion and occupation and the background of Indian defeat and retreat.” What is particularly compelling is White’s contention that in the middle ground, “minor agents, allies, and even subjects at the periphery often guide the course of empires.”¹²

Operating in a middle ground where the influence of the empire is weak, go-betweens were often used to arbitrate relations in ways that over time benefited the interests of the European rather than the Indian world. An American historian grappling with the question of how the English “won” North America reflects that “[t]o understand how the Indians lost America and the English won it, we must look past the grand events—warfare, epidemics, the frontier’s advance—to examine the less celebrated but no less important meetings between peoples.” This “real (and still largely untold) story,” he argues, lies in interactions between Indians and colonists, a history difficult to write because “[t]hese long-forgotten encounters lie in scraps of evidence, mere snatches of conversations.”¹³

In such snatches of conversation go-betweens clearly took center stage, for they were the means of communication in the middle grounds of encounters. Who became go-betweens and who was served by the go-betweens were not inconsequential factors, and they often determined the outcome of meetings, encounters, negotiations, and conversations. As American historian James

Merrell emphasizes, go-betweens were perceived as fundamental to the negotiations between colonial officials and Indians, even if historians have not always perceived their importance.¹⁴

The literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt opens up many of the directions taken in this book. In *Marvelous Possessions*, Greenblatt is interested in the “representational practices” that Europeans carried with them and used to describe the Americas. For Greenblatt, those who wrote about America and Native Americans for European audiences created a “flood of textual representations, along with a much smaller production of visual images,” that “delivered” the New World to the Old. Greenblatt’s go-betweens tend to be the writers of texts and the sculptors of images, but he also recognizes the importance of go-betweens who, through their movement, linked Europe with America. He writes that “European adventurers not only depended upon go-betweens, but were themselves go-betweens.” Of particular interest to Greenblatt are the translators who were essential to many encounters between Europeans and Americans. Reflecting on Doña Marina, Greenblatt represents her as “the figure in whom all communication between the two opposed cultures was concentrated.” “She was,” he writes, Cortés’ “principal access to language—at once his tongue and ears—and hence the key to his hope for survival and success.” Greenblatt even goes so far as to characterize her as “the supreme instance of the go-between in the New World” because she was the figure through whom all communication between the Aztec and Spanish worlds passed.¹⁵

Building on Greenblatt’s observations, it is possible to see that go-betweens play multiple roles and that it is useful to distinguish between them. If we unpack and refine Greenblatt’s generic “go-between,” three major types of go-betweens emerge. At the most basic level is the physical go-between. The men, women, and children who crossed the Atlantic Ocean, thereby linking not only Europe and America, but Europe and Africa, and Africa and America, were all physical go-betweens. Though Greenblatt would argue that every physical go-between carried his or her “representational practices” and was part and parcel of the “representation” of America, I believe they are most significant as biological go-betweens. Biological go-betweens carried disease, introduced European domestic animals, and transplanted American flora and fauna to Europe and Africa. European sailors, sea captains, crews, colonists, and passengers all were physical and biological go-betweens, as were the Africans who traversed the Atlantic as slaves and the Indians who traveled to Europe as slaves, free servants, and exotic people from a new world.

A second type of go-between, the transactional, is the most immediately recognizable. Transactional go-betweens were translators, negotiators, and cultural brokers. Some are famous as individuals, such as Doña Marina or Sacagawea, while others remain nameless but are part of groups that were nevertheless influential, such as the mestizos of colonial Spanish America or the penal exiles of the Portuguese world. Transactional go-betweens possessed complex and shifting loyalties that are difficult for modern historians to reconstruct. Guaman Poma, for example, served as a transactional go-between in Peru following the conquest because of his fluency in Spanish and Quechua; he worked as an interpreter and an informer for Spanish colonial officials. Some of the most interesting of the transactional go-betweens were Indian women, but most still remain invisible in the written historical record.

Europeans as well as Indians perceived the power of the transactional go-between. The visual depictions of Doña Marina and Felipe at Cajamarca appear in documents influenced by Aztec and Andean Indians, who in hindsight saw the power that interpreters had given to the European side during the conquest. Many indigenous groups sought and acquired their own transactional go-betweens. For example, in North America, Hagedorn's work reveals that Iroquois chiefs hired their own interpreters for council fire meetings with English officials, and in Mexico, Indian litigants sought their own scribes, interpreters, and lawyers to pursue their cases before the Spanish courts.¹⁶

The third, and most powerful, type of go-betweens were those who, to use Greenblatt's term, "represented" America and Native Americans for Europeans, or Europeans to Native Americans. Whereas Greenblatt would see all go-betweens as representational, I draw a distinction between them that is largely based on power and influence. I term representational go-betweens those who, through writings, drawings, mapmaking, and the oral tradition, shaped on a large scale how Europeans and Native Americans viewed each other. Representational go-betweens were the cartographers, letter writers, and chroniclers—most but not all of whom were European. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who described the role of Doña Marina in his history of the conquest of Mexico, is an example of a representational go-between. He interprets the conquest of Mexico, arguing that the Spanish were justified in what they did. Similarly, the Jesuits were powerful representational go-betweens for sixteenth-century Brazil; much of our knowledge of the crucial first century of Brazilian history is filtered through their words.

Although representational go-betweens on the Indian side are far more elusive to modern historians than their counterparts on the European side, it is important to remember that they most certainly existed. One of the most compelling is Guaman Poma, whose twelve-hundred-page book with nearly four hundred illustrations intended to inform King Philip III of the situation in Peru, and in particular of the poor treatment Indians received from Spaniards. His book, *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* [1615], is today invaluable because it preserves the history of Peru before, during, and after the conquest from the Andean point of view. Similarly, the *lienços* from colonial Mexico are another kind of representation—a visual picture of landscapes, land and water rights, sacred places, and genealogies—that reflects how the indigenous peoples of Mexico perceived their changing world. Reconstructing the depictions of Europeans from the Indian side in Brazil is more difficult, but the work of anthropologists is very insightful. Anthropologist Laura Graham illustrates how Warodi, a Xavante elder in central Brazil, interpreted past encounters through dreams, and how these images were shared through expressive performances. These portrayals of the past, Graham argues, influenced modern Xavante strategies for interacting with Brazilian government officials. Similarly, fieldwork by anthropologists in modern Amazonia reveals complex renderings of *o branco* (“the whites” or “the white man”). Comparable kinds of processes undoubtedly existed in the past that historians may be able to recover from written records and the oral tradition.¹⁷

Among the representational go-betweens are historians who, positioning themselves between the past and the present, interpret past cultures and represent them for modern readers. I, too, am a representational go-between as I shape an understanding of sixteenth-century Brazil. Like other present-day historians, I see multiple stories in the past, and by choosing to focus on some but not all of the possible themes, groups, series of events, or sets of documents, I construct a narrative of the sixteenth century that reflects what I deem important.

The three kinds of go-betweens that constitute the conceptual framework of this study are summarized in Table 1.1.

This book weaves physical, transactional, and representational go-betweens into a chronological narrative of the first hundred years of Brazilian history. The sixteenth century brought enormous change to indigenous peoples living in what was first called by the Portuguese the Land of the Holy Cross, to the

Table 1.1. Three kinds of go-betweens

<i>Physical/Biological</i>	Those who create material links between worlds; carriers of plants, animals, and disease; bearers of children of mixed race
<i>Transactional</i>	Those who facilitate social interaction between worlds; translators, cultural brokers, negotiators
<i>Representational</i>	Those who write, draw maps, and represent the “other” culture through texts, words, or images; historians

landscape itself, and to the peoples from Europe and Africa who came to live there. In this formative one hundred years, a time when the colony’s future was indeterminate and in flux, patterns of interactions were established that would shape Brazil for centuries to come. Yet unlike the sixteenth century in Mexican, Peruvian, or Caribbean history, the sixteenth century in Brazilian history still remains poorly understood. By rewinding the narrative of Brazilian history back to the sixteenth century, and by looking for the go-betweens and listening to their voices, the formation of Brazil comes into focus.

In the sixteenth century are rooted many of the most important themes of Brazilian history: the discovery, exploration, and mapping of the land; the history of indigenous groups; the origins of slavery; the development of commercial agriculture; the influence of the Jesuits; the formation of religious identity; the ecological destruction of the tropical forests. Each of these themes can be developed into a rich narrative spanning the entire century, but it is my intention to tell one story: how the Portuguese won Brazil through the agency of go-betweens. In telling this story, I dip into many of the thematic narratives of the sixteenth century, and in referencing them I hope to provide a synthetic picture of the sixteenth century in Brazil.

This book ends in 1600, not because the story ends there, but because by that time the Portuguese had “won” the battle for key regions along the coast of Brazil. Increasingly during the sixteenth century, the arbitration provided by go-betweens granted the advantage to the Portuguese in their struggle with the Indians over which culture would dominate. With their colonies firmly established along the coast by the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese colonists were then able to extend their influence to new regions, where many of the same patterns of interaction would be replicated. Just as go-betweens had been indispensable in the “winning” of coastal Brazil in the sixteenth century, so, too, would they be crucial in tilting new frontiers toward Portugal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in fostering the emergence of modern Brazil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Paradoxically, as the power and influence of the Portuguese increased in Brazil in the sixteenth century, the kingdom of Portugal was losing its influence in Europe. The extensive Portuguese maritime empire that kings of the Portuguese House of Avis had developed systematically from the early fifteenth century began to crack in the last quarter of the sixteenth. In 1578, the death of young King Sebastião in an ill-conceived, medieval-like crusade against Muslims in North Africa plunged Portugal into a dynastic crisis. King Philip II of Spain manipulated Portugal's weakness and imposed his claim to the throne in 1580, thereby bringing to an end the dynasty of the House of Avis. Although the administration of Portugal and Brazil remained separate from that of Spain, Portugal and Brazil immediately felt the effects of the Spanish succession. Philip impressed Portugal's fine merchant fleet into the armada that he sent against Queen Elizabeth in 1588. Its destruction dealt a severe blow to Portuguese mercantile trade. Portuguese possessions in Africa, America, and India fell under increasing attack by Spain's enemies, most notably the Dutch. Appended to Spain, Portugal, the once proud leader of maritime exploration, was destroyed politically, financially, and morally.¹⁸ Yet, despite Portugal's declining power in the sixteenth century, it increasingly "won" Brazil. How was this possible? And when during the long sixteenth century did Portugal "win" Brazil? The answers to these questions lie with the go-betweens who are the subject of this book.

Seeking to understand these go-betweens and their power, I begin this book with the premise that in the encounters of the sixteenth century, hundreds of go-betweens were present—some named, but most not. I then retell the history of the sixteenth century in order to make the roles of these go-betweens visible. By examining the three kinds of go-betweens—physical, transactional, and representational—it is possible to see how go-betweens shaped the birth and evolution of the relationship between Portugal and Brazil. The Portuguese gained significant advantage in Brazil not by controlling all of the go-betweens, but by ensuring that the majority of them arbitrated for the Portuguese side. But the world that the Portuguese won through these go-betweens was not a reproduction of Portugal, nor did the "won" colony take the form that the kings of Portugal had once imagined. By 1600, the landscape and the peoples of Brazil differed markedly from those of Portugal. And even if Portugal could claim Brazil as a colony, that did not mean that Portuguese authority reigned supreme. Go-betweens had their own interests and exercised their own power, and conflicts erupted between them, even between those go-betweens who mediated for

sixteenth-century atlas drawn in the French style known as the Dieppe School, several scenes of encounters appear as illustrations drawn over the interior of Brazil. One detail that portrays a European man engaged in trade with Indian men and women is particularly suggestive of the go-between. The European looks out from Brazil, as if across the Atlantic Ocean. With his index finger, he points to the brazilwood logs that Indian men have assembled. By his side is a basket of trading goods. The nameless European man portrayed in this cartographic detail is clearly a physical go-between who had crossed the ocean and entered Brazil. Although the artist does not reveal how, it is clear that this man is in charge of the exchange between the European world and Brazil, thus playing the role of the transactional go-between. And the fact that the artist chose to use him to represent Brazil illustrates the artist's recognition of his importance in the Brazilian trade (Fig. 1.3).¹⁹

As we shall see, the simple words, exchanges, and interactions hinted at in this drawing carried great and far-reaching consequences. For this nameless man (who is drawn significantly larger and in more detail than the indigenous men with whom he trades) clearly serves the European side. He stands above a carefully drawn coastline that is labeled with names familiar even to this day, and his feet intersect with the radii of the compass rose that the cartographer has drawn just offshore. This man finds himself in Brazil because of the navigational expertise of European mariners, and he uses his skill to acquire the riches of Brazil. Such encounters and the patterns of interaction they began had occurred before and would be repeated over and over again. As this detail suggests, and as this book shows, go-betweens were central to the colonization of Brazil.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

2. *Encounter*

... he spoke their language and gave information on everything.

Besicken Letter, 1505

It is tempting to see a single day, 23 April 1500, when the Portuguese admiral Pedro Álvares Cabral anchored his fleet of twelve ships off the coast of Brazil, as the beginning. Because his destination was India, Cabral remained in Brazil for only ten days, yet those few days in April and May marked the official Portuguese discovery of Brazil. Every recorded event and observation, therefore, is important and worthy of the attention of historians. But on closer inspection, what stands out in the surviving accounts is the calculated and restrained behavior of the Portuguese. Not only were they not particularly surprised by the situation at hand, but they understood the need to proceed with care. With the exception of the physical descriptions of the landscape and its inhabitants, the very ordinariness of Cabral's days in Brazil emerges in the long letter written by Pero Vaz de Caminha, a nobleman in the fleet. There is little in Cabral's behavior, or in that of his captains and crew, that Caminha finds particularly remarkable. This tone is even more pronounced in two other surviving sources: an account written by an anonymous Portuguese pilot or scribe, and a letter from Mestre (Master) João, a highly educated cosmographer, astronomer, and physician. Indeed, the comportment of the Portuguese, as revealed in these accounts, unfolds as if from a script, one that had been written from the experiences of hundreds of mariners before them. Those mariners had sailed, observed, charted, and mapped the entire west coast of Africa; they had hailed ports in East Africa and India; they had traded with kings; and they had contacted many previously unknown and unfamiliar peoples. Everything Cabral did in Brazil was informed

by what the Portuguese had learned from their experience in Africa. And one of the things the Portuguese well understood was the danger of an encounter without go-betweens.¹

Go-betweens at all three levels—physical, transactional, and representational—laid the foundation for Cabral's voyage, which did not linger in Brazil but continued on to India. In the fifteenth century, go-betweens facilitated the burst of Portuguese exploration and trade in Africa. *Homens do mar* (men of the sea) became physical go-betweens who connected diverse worlds, long isolated from each other. Among the key lessons mastered by Portuguese sea captains in the African trade was the crucial importance of transactional go-betweens—the translators and intermediaries—many of whom were not Portuguese, but Africans and increasingly Afro-Portuguese. Representational go-betweens drew the maps that guided captains and merchants and that with time dramatically recast how Europeans understood the wider world.

Whether their landing in Brazil in 1500 was accidental or not, Cabral and his men certainly planned to tie this new land henceforth into the world of Portugal, India, and Africa. The men on the twelve ships were each physical go-betweens. Some collected data, such as shooting their latitude where they made landfall, which would be transferred onto the charts carried by Cabral's captains.² On its return to Portugal, this information became crucial to the first depictions of Brazil on charts, maps, and especially the official map kept by the Crown. Other men certainly hoped to profit in some way from the information they could pass on to potential patrons, such as merchants, when they returned to Lisbon. But the expedition did not have any transactional go-betweens suitable for Brazil. Although Cabral's armada possessed many interpreters, none was able to communicate verbally with the peoples they met in Brazil. This fact made Cabral's ten days in Brazil potentially a very dangerous time.

Stephen Greenblatt characterizes an encounter without an interpreter as "a complete blank, a brute clash of bodies in which the invaders, hopelessly outnumbered, would certainly be destroyed."³ Such was nearly the case when Vicente Yáñez Pinzón led four ships to the northern coast of Brazil in 1500 just a few months before Cabral. Pinzón, a Spanish captain who had sailed with Columbus in 1492, found out firsthand the danger of not having translators on board. As related in one of the earliest published accounts of the sixteenth century, written by Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, Pinzón anchored along the northeastern coast of Brazil and sent twenty-five armed men ashore to reconnoiter at night. Silently observing a well-populated village, the men withdrew. But when

Pinzón sent forty armed men ashore the next morning, they soon found themselves surrounded by “big men with grim faces of cruel aspect” who did not cease threatening the Spaniards. Later, sailing along the coast still south of the mouth of the Amazon, Pinzón and his men met “an infinite number of naked people, who showed with gestures and acts that they greatly desired commerce with our men,” but when four boats of Spaniards did attempt to land, the Indians captured one of the boats and its captain, and eight Spaniards died before the rest managed to escape.⁴ These two encounters lacked translators, and without them, Pinzón and his men could choose either to withdraw or to fight.

Without translators, captains such as Pinzón could not always meet their most basic needs for food and water, nor satisfy their larger desires for trade and information. Yet, three months later, when Cabral landed farther south along the coast of Brazil and likewise possessed no translators, the initial encounter was certainly successful from the Portuguese point of view. That success rested in part on the Portuguese understanding of the importance of transactional go-betweens and their past experience in such situations.

Given the absence of translators, one might think that the success of Cabral's landing had everything to do with chance. Indeed, according to an account written by the anonymous pilot or scribe on Cabral's expedition, there was little communication, through either language or signs, during Cabral's time in Brazil.⁵ One might easily surmise, then, that these ten days were a long pantomime in which the Portuguese and the Tupi-speaking peoples they met there attempted to communicate through signs. But Caminha judged that much communication had been possible. In his letter, he emphasizes the importance of gestures, good manners, successful exchanges, and even music. Caminha describes how Cabral allowed Indians to board his ship, where he served them food and drink and permitted them to spend the night. He notes how one of the Portuguese captains listened patiently to an Indian elder speak even “without anyone ever being able to understand him or he us.” Later he relates how one of the pilots, an experienced mariner by the name of Diogo Dias, danced and laughed and played with the people on shore to the music piped by a piper from the fleet; and on another day, Caminha includes the fact that the Indians danced to the sound of a Portuguese drum. Although lacking in verbal communication, these interactions convinced Caminha that the Indians were “our friends.”⁶

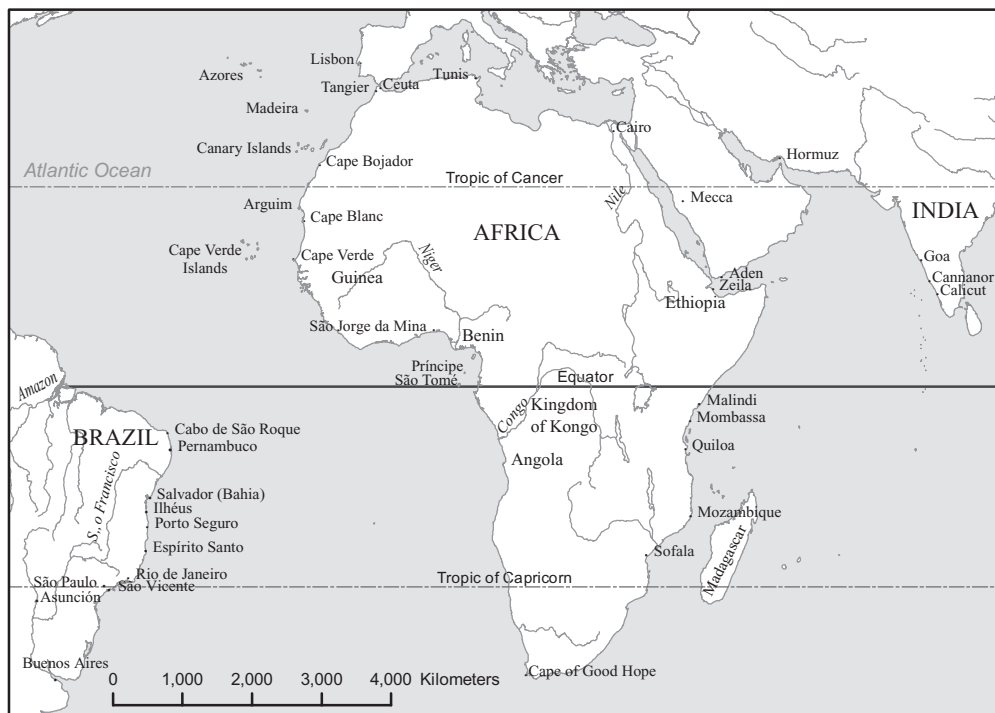
The sixteenth-century historian of the Portuguese discoveries, João de Barros, later provided more details of the first language encounter. His account makes clear that he understood the Portuguese trading practices in Africa to be the model

for the first contact with Brazil. Barros writes that Cabral sent a boat ashore with a black sailor as an interpreter. This sailor, who may have been a slave and was most likely an African, tried to speak with the peoples of Brazil in a language of West Africa. When he failed to communicate, other interpreters who knew Arabic and other languages also tried to make themselves understood. Only when all were “tired of waiting for a sign of understanding” did the men return to the ships.⁷

Cabral recognized that communication without language did not serve Portuguese interests and called a meeting of his captains to address the problem. According to Caminha, Cabral “asked his captains whether it would be well to take by force a pair of these [Indian] men to send to Your Highness, leaving behind, in their place, a pair of male criminal exiles.” Cabral had brought nearly two dozen *degradados* (criminal exiles) on his expedition with the intention of leaving them behind in situations such as the one he found in Brazil. The two young men he proposed to leave in Brazil had been condemned to death for crimes committed in Portugal but had had their sentences commuted to banishment. According to Caminha, the captains agreed to leave the two *degradados* when the armada set sail, but counseled against taking anybody from Brazil. Caminha states that the captains were of the opinion that persons taken by force did not generally give accurate information, whereas the *degradados* would. Although this act of leaving behind the two men did not help Cabral, it laid the foundation for the creation of translators, necessary for future interaction with Brazil.⁸

The crucial roles that transactional go-betweens would play in Africa in the fifteenth century, and later in Asia and Brazil in the sixteenth, were not initially perceived, nor was there at the outset a conscious Portuguese strategy for creating them. Instead, the importance of go-betweens came into focus only gradually as the Portuguese experimented with trade in Africa. Initially, the Portuguese operated from a very different model of cultural interaction, one that was shaped by medieval traditions of chivalry and crusade. Well after the end of the Portuguese Reconquest, that tradition, which promoted war rather than diplomacy, lingered as the preferred means to deal with enemies or to encounter new peoples.

The Portuguese Reconquest, a century-long war between Christians and Muslims, ended in 1249 with the defeat of the last Muslim kingdom in southern Portugal. As in Spain, the Portuguese Reconquest took on the overtones of a medieval crusade in which Portuguese Christians, their ranks often bolstered with crusaders from northern Europe, saw themselves as justified in attacking



Map 2.1. The Portuguese maritime world in Africa, India, and Brazil

Muslims. After successful campaigns, battle lords received lands and booty taken from Muslim Iberians, as well as titles of nobility from the Portuguese king. By the end of the thirteenth century, Christian kings of Castile and Aragon in Iberia already envisioned extending the Reconquest south into Muslim North Africa to reclaim what had once been the Christian Visigothic province of Mauretania Tingitana, which had been ruled from Toledo. Similarly, religious and economic motivations, wrapped in the traditional language of chivalry and crusade, led Portugal to Africa. With the end of the Reconquest in Portugal, and with it the chances for obtaining honor through service to God and the king in battle, the Portuguese kings and nobles looked to Africa as a place where crusading might continue.⁹

This medieval crusading mentality resulted in the planning of a highly secret Portuguese assault on the Muslim city of Ceuta, an attack that historians cite as the beginning of the Portuguese exploration of Africa. Ceuta lay just across the Strait of Gibraltar in Morocco, and like other cities in northern Africa,

it served as a Mediterranean terminus for the overland Saharan trade. The highly developed trans-Saharan trade linked the western African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai to the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East; over its routes merchants carried gold, slaves, ivory, kola nuts, and salt out of the sub-Saharan African kingdoms and imported into them textiles, slaves, horses, and wheat. Much of the gold that entered Western Europe came across the Sahara in such caravans. As one modern scholar writes, there had always been “a golden thread linking the Iberian Peninsula through the western Maghrib with the sub-Saharan regions of Africa.” Literate Iberians knew something of sub-Saharan Africa through the stories told by a Spanish Franciscan monk in a book titled *El libro del conocimiento*, and Abraham Cresques’ Atlas of 1375 identified several of the African cities, such as Timbuktu, on the trail across the Sahara. From the *Rihla*, or book of travels, which recounts the experiences of Abu ‘Abdallah ibn Battuta, a Muslim from Tangier, and which was well known throughout the Islamic world of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Iberians likely knew about the salt and gold mines of Mali.¹⁰

More than one hundred ships with 19,000 men under arms sailed from a plague-infested Lisbon in 1415, their destination unknown to all but a few. Armed with a papal bull that declared the attack a crusade against Islam, King João I (1385–1433) of Portugal, along with his sons, led the assault against Ceuta, a city also weakened by the plague. The city fell in just thirteen hours. After looting the city and consecrating the mosques to Christian use, King João knighted his sons, who in turn knighted others in their retinues. The invasion and sacking of Ceuta symbolized the extension of the Reconquest into North Africa and reflected how deeply steeped in its medieval traditions of chivalry and crusade Portugal remained in the fifteenth century. This same crusading mentality led Portugal to besiege other North African cities, such as Tangier, but with far less success.¹¹

The Portuguese advances in Africa, however, proved not to be through the capture of the North African port cities, such as Ceuta, nor was it due to their Reconquest mentality. Rather, their success lay in the extension of sea travel and trade along the coasts of West Africa. Portuguese mariners under the patronage of the Portuguese royal family explored the coast of Africa, established a maritime link to the trans-Saharan trade, and colonized the islands of the Atlantic. These strategies succeeded because the Portuguese quickly learned how to use intermediaries in situations where they were at a disadvantage. Translators and

bilingual brokers facilitated Portuguese interaction and trade with new peoples along the coast of Africa.¹²

Historians have long pointed to the patronage and vision of the Infante Dom Henrique (d. 1460), the third son of King João I, and his English wife, Philippa of Lancaster. Known in English as Prince Henry the Navigator and to his subjects as Dom Henrique or O Infante (the prince), Prince Henry is credited by historians with financing expeditions, promoting the caravel (a small ship rigged with triangular sails easily handled in coastal rivers and estuaries), demanding new standards in the drawing of maps, and supporting refinements in the art of navigation—all of which facilitated Portuguese ventures into the Atlantic Ocean. During Prince Henry's lifetime, Portuguese sea captains discovered Atlantic archipelagoes—Madeira, the Azores, and Cape Verde—and after his death, São Tomé and Príncipe. Prince Henry supported the work of cartographers, who mapped the coast of West Africa, thus establishing the foundation for a sea route to India as well as a new cartographic tradition that would revolutionize how Europeans understood the world. Yet, a modern biographer of Prince Henry argues that although these accomplishments have led historians to see Prince Henry as having a tremendous scientific legacy, in fact he was very much a medieval man who lived by a code of chivalry, believed fully in the morality of crusades against Islam, and trusted in the power of visionary dreams.¹³

A caravel, its sails emblazoned with a red cross, was the visual emblem of Prince Henry's campaign of exploration. The red cross symbolized the Order of Christ, a religious military order founded in 1319 to defend the Christian faith in Portugal, and the caravel was a ship well suited to coastal exploration and trade. After Prince Henry became administrator general of the order in 1420, its treasury helped to finance the voyages of exploration. In return, Prince Henry earmarked levies on goods from the African trade for the Order of Christ.¹⁴

In 1419, two young noblemen in the service of Prince Henry “officially” discovered the island of Porto Santo in the archipelago of Madeira. When it and the other islands in the group were found to be uninhabited, the Portuguese king made their colonization his personal project. In 1427, a Portuguese pilot discovered another Atlantic archipelago, the Azores, one thousand miles from Portugal. Because these islands were so distant from Africa, their colonization proceeded more slowly, and they remained on the periphery of the Portuguese

Atlantic world of the fifteenth century. During the last years of Prince Henry's life, in 1455–1456, sea captains under his patronage discovered the Cape Verde Islands. Given the proximity of these islands to the coast of Guinea, colonization began almost immediately. After Prince Henry's death in 1460, sea captains discovered yet another archipelago of islands, the two most important being São Tomé and Príncipe. These islands would also figure largely in the Portuguese maritime commerce with West Africa.¹⁵

The Portuguese Crown began modest colonization initiatives on the Atlantic islands, all of which were uninhabited, by turning to *degredados*, the very same sort of criminal exiles that Cabral would leave behind in Brazil some eighty years later. As a form of punishment, exile to frontier regions had deep roots in the Portuguese legal tradition, but with the development of overseas interests, the Portuguese Crown found a new use for prisoners deemed dangerous. In theory, penal exile was a privilege reserved for the nobility; commoners in a similar situation were to be exiled to the rowing galleys. In practice, however, exile became a regular punishment for commoners, both male and female, once Portugal had lands that needed settlers. When the exiles arrived at their place of banishment, they were allowed to live normal lives: they could move freely, they could work, they could marry and establish families. Thus, exiles became colonists, and as “forced colonists,” they were ideally suited to the needs of a Crown bent on colonizing remote outposts.¹⁶

Portuguese colonists brought sugarcane to Madeira and imported large groups of African slaves to tend the plantations, creating the first Atlantic sugar economy. São Tomé and Príncipe, settled by Portuguese colonists, *degredados*, Jewish children forcibly taken from their parents, and slaves, followed the pattern established in Madeira. All of the Atlantic islands became important ports of call for Portuguese ships traveling along the coast of West Africa and would continue to play that role in the transatlantic voyages, initiated after 1500.¹⁷

Along the west coast of Africa, the Portuguese developed a maritime trade that competed with the overland trans-Saharan trade, long dominated by Arabic-speaking Muslim merchants. Individual Portuguese captains could initially obtain valuable cargoes by looting and attacking coastal villages, but to establish a more viable trade, the Portuguese had to make contact with African peoples and come to agreements with African chiefs. Modern African historian George Brooks emphasizes that it was the Europeans who “were obliged to adapt to African trading patterns and modes of social intercourse.” This required that

the Portuguese abandon their medieval crusade and conquest mentality and rely on transactional go-betweens to negotiate their interests.¹⁸

According to contemporary chroniclers, Prince Henry recognized the importance of translators and other intermediaries and took care to cultivate them. A Portuguese chronicler of the fifteenth century, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, writes that as early as 1436 a Portuguese captain, Alfonso Gonçalves Baldaia, carried orders from Prince Henry “to go as far as you can” and “to work to have an interpreter of these people.” Baldaia sailed along the coast of modern-day Morocco and Moroccan Sahara past Cape Bojador, crossed the Tropic of Cancer, and almost reached Cape Blanc. Although Baldaia returned to Portugal having traveled farther than any previous voyage, and with a cargo of five thousand sea lion skins, he brought back no interpreter, leaving the Portuguese still unable to communicate with the non-Arabic-speaking peoples of Africa.¹⁹

From Zurara’s account, it is clear that the very first translators along the coast of Africa did not willingly adopt this role and that the Portuguese used their conquest mentality to obtain their first interpreters. Antão Gonçalves and Nuno Tristão, whom Zurara cites as the first captains to bring potential interpreters back to Prince Henry, seized them by force from Berber peoples living in what is today Mauritania. First Gonçalves and his men plotted the capture of a “man or a woman” whom they could bring back to Prince Henry. Then Tristão brazenly advocated the seizure of many more. Following Tristão’s plan, three groups of armed Portuguese secretly approached and attacked two villages at night. Drawing on Reconquest traditions, the men yelled “Portugal!” and “Santiago!” (St. James) before storming in. At least ten men, women, and boys were captured. One of the captives, a nobleman named Adahu, could make himself understood with an interpreter on Tristão’s ship. For Zurara, the return of these two ships with their captives marked a turning point in Prince Henry’s exploration of Africa. Although the Portuguese could not yet communicate easily with most of their African captives, Prince Henry was able to learn a great deal from Adahu. With Antão Gonçalves, Adahu later returned to his homeland, where his people delivered a ransom of slaves in return for his freedom. Tristão also returned to West Africa and found it easy to acquire more captives than his boats could carry.²⁰

One hundred years later, Portuguese chronicler João de Barros similarly cites the importance of interpreters on the early voyages to Africa. For example, Barros writes that what Prince Henry most wanted was “an interpreter of this

land because his intention in these discoveries was not the end of commerce, but to find people of that land, so remote from the church, and to bring them to baptism, and afterwards, to have communication and commerce with them for the benefit of the kingdom [of Portugal].”²¹

Zurara and Barros not only emphasize the importance of the communication provided by interpreters, but they recognize that the loyalty of the go-between was not certain and that go-betweens could equally well serve Africans. In their description of the voyage of Gonçalo de Sintra, for example, they reveal how the captain lost a key interpreter. The voyage occurred after the Portuguese had become aware that the Senegal River divided West Africa geographically and ethnically: to the north of the river lived “brown, slim, and short” peoples in an arid land, whereas south of the river lived “very black, tall, big, and well shaped” peoples in a fertile land of great trees and many kinds of fruits.²² Captain Sintra deviated from the orders given by Prince Henry to sail south of the Senegal River directly to Guinea, which the Portuguese now called “the land of the blacks,” and stopped first at the island of Arguim to see if he could obtain Berber captives. Sintra had with him one of Prince Henry’s best Berber interpreters, a boy who “already knew the greater part of our language,” Zurara writes, but because Sintra did not take sufficient care, the boy deserted one night. The intended interpreter for the Portuguese then gave the Berbers on the island information about the Portuguese. Sintra, determined to salvage his honor and his expedition, selected twelve of his best men to go ashore at midnight, but trapped by the tide, they were easily overwhelmed. Eight men, including Sintra, lost their lives. Zurara saw Sintra’s death as teaching many lessons, two of which directly applied to go-betweens. Zurara believed that interpreters must be closely guarded in foreign lands. Moreover, he recommended that when “our enemies” have their own interpreters and information on “our power and our desires[,] . . . we must take great care when entering their lands.” In other words, when the Africans had transactional go-betweens, the Portuguese were at an even greater disadvantage.²³

Zurara and Barros were particularly impressed with a new kind of transactional go-between: a Portuguese man who went native among the Berbers. Both write about a João Fernandes who lived among the Berbers for seven months. Zurara describes João Fernandes as wishing “by his own will” to remain behind “to see things” and to “bring information” to Prince Henry when he returned to Portugal. Barros describes Fernandes as someone who intended to see for

himself the lands of the Berbers, and to provide Prince Henry with information about them, because “he had confidence in their language, which he knew.” Fernandes apparently had lived as a captive among Muslims in northern Africa and knew Arabic. Left by Antão Gonçalves in 1444, when Gonçalves returned, Fernandes immediately facilitated trade between Gonçalves and a Muslim merchant named Ahude. Zurara’s account reveals that considerable preparations were made before any trade took place. Ahude and Gonçalves exchanged men, two on each side, to be held as surety. For Zurara, the pains taken were richly rewarded, for Gonçalves traded “things of little value” for nine slaves and a little gold dust. Barros recounts how Fernandes returned “healthy and safe” to Portugal, where he became a great source of information on the Muslim Berber peoples of West Africa.²⁴

As the Portuguese sought new trading opportunities farther south, translators continued to be part of their unfolding strategy. References to the presence of interpreters on Portuguese ships invariably appear in the sources when sea captains could no longer communicate with Africans, which meant that they had reached the limits of the region where they could successfully trade. The Portuguese knew that they faced great danger when they initiated contact in a new region. As a result, sea captains tended to avoid prolonged contact with peoples for whom they had no interpreter. The Venetian merchant and navigator Alvise Cadamosto (also spelled Ca’da Mosto), who sailed on two Portuguese expeditions to the Guinea coast, in 1455 and 1456, often referred to the *truci-mani* (intermediaries) and *linguaçi* (translators) on board. He expressed dismay when, on the second voyage, the interpreters could not parlay with Africans in two large canoes that had come out to meet his ship. The expedition resolved to turn back because, as they were “traveling in new lands,” nothing could be done without new interpreters. Similarly, another Italian merchant, Antoniotto Usodimare, who entered the Portuguese-sponsored African trade to Guinea when he found himself heavily in debt, reckoned that he reached a place “where no Christian had ever arrived.” There African fishermen showered his ship with arrows, “judging that we were enemies,” he wrote to his brothers. “And I,” he continued, “seeing that they did not wish to receive us, saw myself obliged to return.”²⁵

After Usodimare retreated from where he had been attacked, he met “a noble black lord” who traded forty slaves, a few elephant teeth, parrots, and musk (*almíscar*) for his cloth. Because Usodimare thought that this chief understood

his desire for further trade, he agreed to take an emissary of the chief with him back to Portugal. Usodimare writes that the chief “sent with me to the king of Portugal one of his secretaries with a few slaves.”²⁶ This emissary suggests that the Africans well understood the importance of having their own go-betweens; perhaps he had been given the task of negotiating peace and trade between this chief and the king of Portugal.

After Prince Henry’s death, the Portuguese Crown took over his role. When Pedro de Sintra first reached Sierra Leone in 1462, he detained a man to comply with an order given by King Afonso (1438–1481) that he return with a new interpreter. The king had ordered that when Sintra judged that he had reached the farthest point of his voyage, if his interpreters could not be understood, he was to try to bring back to Portugal “several blacks of that land” so that they could try to communicate with the many African interpreters resident in Portugal. Similarly, when Diogo Cão first reached the Congo River, the language spoken was not one understood by the several interpreters that he already had with him. Accordingly, Portuguese chronicler Rui de Pina writes, Cão returned to Portugal with several Africans so that “later, after having learned the language customs, and intent of the king, and of the kingdom of Portugal, they would return to their lands and be the means through which the things from one side and the other could be well communicated.” By 1494, when the German physician Jerome Münzer visited Portugal, he found that a number of black youths from Africa were being educated so that they might be sent back to Africa as missionaries, interpreters, and emissaries of the king.²⁷

Although the trade with Africa enriched Portugal with gold and slaves, the Portuguese never lost sight of a possible sea route to Asia. If such a route could be opened, it would allow the Portuguese direct access to the spices of the Orient, then controlled by Muslim merchants in the Middle East. These middlemen sold Asian spices to Venetian merchants in Egypt, who then marketed the spices in Europe. A sea route to Asia would eliminate both the Middle Eastern and the Venetian middlemen and hence promised great profits for Portuguese merchants. Establishing a sea route to India required information, which the Portuguese obtained through spies and other agents. Just as go-betweens had been instrumental in the Portuguese exploration, trade, and colonization of West Africa, so, too, would they be in East Africa and Asia.

Vasco da Gama’s successful voyage to India in 1498 rested not only on decades of Portuguese experience in sailing, navigation, and mapmaking, but

also on Portuguese familiarity with encountering new peoples and exploiting the opportunities for trade. Interpreters, ambassadors, spies, and cultural brokers of various kinds were vital. In 1487, King João II (1481–1495) instructed Bartolomeu Dias to round the Cape of Good Hope, which he did with three caravels the following year. At the same time, the king entrusted a highly secret mission to two go-betweens who served as spies. One of the men, Pêro da Covilhã, was fluent in Arabic. The two men traveled to Cairo via Naples and Rhodes. From Cairo, they joined a caravan headed to Arabia. At Aden, the men separated: Covilhã headed to India while his companion, Afonso de Paiva, set out for Ethiopia. Covilhã visited the major commercial centers of western India: Calicut, Cannanore (today Kannur), and Goa, and after assessing the spice trade in these cities, he visited two cities of the east coast of Africa, Zeila (in present-day Somaliland) and Sofala (in present-day Mozambique). On returning to Cairo, he met up with two more emissaries sent by the Portuguese king, a Jewish rabbi from the Portuguese town of Beja and a Jewish shoemaker from the Portuguese town of Lamengo, who instructed him to write up a report to send back to the king, and then to continue to Ethiopia. Such missions led historian A. J. R. Russell-Wood to argue that to assess only the maritime successes of the Portuguese is to miss the great importance of “terrestrial initiatives,” that is, the information the Portuguese acquired through “diplomatic, commercial, and religious initiatives.” The information that Covilhã provided, for example, clearly influenced the strategy used to prepare for Vasco da Gama’s voyage, even though King João II died before the voyage began.²⁸

King João’s successor, Manuel I (1495–1521), chose Vasco da Gama to lead the expedition to India. Leaving Lisbon in July of 1497 with four ships, one of which carried only supplies, da Gama sailed to the Cape Verde Islands and then directly for the Cape of Good Hope. His was not a large expedition, and therefore when da Gama arrived at the Cape, he relied on strategies that the Portuguese had perfected to avoid unnecessary violence and loss of life. Many details of these strategies for contacting Africans, both at the Cape of Good Hope and in East Africa, emerge in a journal written by one of the men on his expedition. The sailor’s journal relates that when the Portuguese first made landfall just north of the Cape of Good Hope, they took an African captive, brought him on board da Gama’s ship, and sat him at a table where “he ate of all we ate.” The next morning, after spending the night on the ship, the captive was sent ashore in new clothes. Over the next few days, trade began, not so much because the Portuguese wanted to

acquire things of value, but to ascertain what kinds of goods the land possessed. Care was taken to keep the atmosphere from turning violent. When the Africans played their musical instruments, for example, da Gama “ordered the trumpets to be sounded,” and the sailor reports that “we, in the boats, danced, and the captain-major did so likewise.” When da Gama feared his interpreter was in danger, he ordered a display of crossbows and lances, but not one that would result in overt conflict, for in the words of the seaman, “we had no desire to employ them.” Da Gama also ordered the beach shelled by the bombard guns “to prove that we were able, although unwilling to hurt them.” Later, after they rounded the Cape of Good Hope, da Gama continued to send his interpreters ashore, to present gifts of clothing to African chiefs, to trade, to invite individuals aboard, and to listen to music.²⁹

Contacts and encounters became more complicated when the Portuguese sailed into waters in East Africa long dominated by Muslim merchants. The seaman’s journal describes the lords of the land south of Mozambique as “very haughty” and notes that they “valued nothing which we gave them.” But when da Gama reached Mozambique, his interpreters who spoke Arabic acquired detailed information from four Muslim merchants who had vessels in port laden with gold, silver, cloves, pepper, ginger, and pearls. This information made da Gama’s men “so happy that we cried with joy, and prayed God to grant us health, so that we might behold what we so much desired.” Da Gama negotiated for two Muslim pilots for the journey up the coast of East Africa. Such interactions, historian Jeremy Prestholdt claims, mean that the Portuguese did not immediately dismiss the Muslims they met all along the coast of East Africa as enemies, but rather recognized them as “familiar” and “known.” The Portuguese sought Swahili-speaking Muslims to become their pilots, interpreters, and cultural brokers.³⁰

Still, in all encounters, danger was present. Open conflict broke out when the Portuguese were prevented from drawing water north of Mozambique. When da Gama reached Mombassa, he mistrusted overtures from that country’s king. After receiving a gift from the king of Mombassa, da Gama sent two *degredados* ashore “to confirm these peaceful assurances.” The great Portuguese poet of the sixteenth century, Luís de Camões, includes this detail in his epic poem *The Lusíads*:

Even so, from among those prisoners
On board, sentenced for gross crimes

So their lives would be hazarded
 In predicaments such as these,
 He sent two of the cleverest, trained
 To spy on the city and defences
 Of the resourceful Muslims
 (2.7)

Da Gama remained wary, so he resorted to torture to extract information from his Muslim pilots, on whom he depended but whom he did not trust.³¹

In Malindi, da Gama obtained an expert pilot who guided him to Calicut, India.³² Once anchored at Calicut, da Gama sent ashore one of his *degredados*, who was astonished to meet two North Africans from Tunis who spoke Castilian and Genoese. According to the journal written by one of the men in da Gama's expedition, the first greeting the *degredado* received from these Castilian-speaking Muslims was: "May the devil take thee! What brought you hither?" Later, when the *degredado* returned to his ship with one of the Muslims, the author of the journal recorded that the Muslim declared: "A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You owe great thanks to God for having brought you to a country holding such riches!"³³ The poet Camões celebrates the importance of the meeting and of this man, whom he names Monsayeed:

Among those who came running to see him
 Was a Mohammedan born in Barbary . . .
 Catching sight of the envoy, he exclaimed
 In delight, and in fluent Castilian
 —"Who brought you to this other world
 So far from your native Portugal?"
 (7.24–25)

Camões portrays Monsayeed as a great boon to da Gama, despite the fact that he was Muslim. In Camões' poem, Monsayeed was welcomed aboard the Portuguese ships, where da Gama embraced him and "plied him with questions / About India and all its ways" (7.29).³⁴

India and all of its ways nearly proved to be the undoing of da Gama. When he and thirteen men disembarked to meet the *zamorin*, the ruler of Calicut, the

small band of Portuguese men soon found themselves overwhelmed by the size of the crowds and the authority of the zamorin. Da Gama presented himself as an ambassador from the king of Portugal, and requested and received a private audience. Two days later, however, the zamorin kept da Gama waiting for four hours. Da Gama had prepared a gift of cloth, hoods and hats, strings of coral, hand-washing basins, sugar, oil, and honey for the zamorin, but the zamorin's factor and governor laughed when they saw it, saying that "the poorest merchant from Mecca, or any other part of India, gave more, and that if he [da Gama] wanted to make a present it should be in gold, as the king would not accept such things." Da Gama decided to forego the gift and simply present himself as an ambassador; he gave two letters, written in Portuguese and Arabic, to the zamorin from King Manuel. Again da Gama felt at a disadvantage, because he could not understand the letter written in Arabic. He asked the zamorin for a Christian interpreter who spoke Arabic. The interpreter, however, could not read Arabic, and da Gama soon found himself listening, but unable to understand, the translation of the letter from King Manuel given to the zamorin by four Muslim interpreters.³⁵

Da Gama continued to exchange letters and messages—as well as threats, hostages, and prisoners—with the zamorin and his officials while he remained in India. Some trading occurred, but it proved to be disadvantageous to the Portuguese, for their trading goods, highly valued in Africa, were not deemed as desirable in India. Moreover, they competed directly with Muslim merchants, who did not welcome them. Translators and informants protected the safety of the Portuguese expedition by enabling the Portuguese to "parlay" rather than attack their way in and around Calicut. The information obtained was often imprecise, but it nevertheless enabled the Portuguese to gain a foothold. When da Gama left Calicut in August 1498, he carried away with him several men from India and took one more off Angediva Island, a man who spoke fluent Venetian and claimed to be a Christian forced into Islam. Later the Portuguese learned that this man, Gaspar da Gama, was a Jew and very knowledgeable about India.³⁶

After a difficult journey, two of da Gama's ships, carrying just over half of the original crew, returned to Lisbon.³⁷ In addition to the information supplied by da Gama and his men, Gaspar da Gama provided detailed information in Lisbon about the spice trade, Muslim navigation techniques, trading commodities, and religious customs of India. King Manuel I quickly prepared a second

expedition to India. João de Barros, the great Portuguese historian of the sixteenth century, vividly describes a Sunday, 8 March in 1500, when King Manuel and his entire court traveled to the mouth of the Tagus River to bid Pedro Álvares Cabral, the admiral of this second expedition, good-bye. At the church of Nossa Senhora de Belém (Our Lady of Bethlehem), they heard mass said by the bishop of Ceuta, the city in Africa whose capture in 1415 had marked the beginning of the Portuguese exploration of Africa. A flag of the Order of Christ adorned the altar, and the bishop blessed it before the king gave it to Cabral. The flag, considered by Barros to be a symbol of Portuguese temporal and spiritual victories, was then carried as part of a procession of crosses and holy relics to the beach, where Cabral kissed the king's hand and bade him farewell. Nearly the whole city of Lisbon had gathered to watch the spectacle—many crowded onto the beach, others stood in the nearby fields, and still others boarded small boats for the best view. The music of horns, flutes, and drums filled the air as the men of the sea who were about to embark on such a long voyage sought to quell the “sadness of the sea.” “The hearts of all were between pleasure and tears,” Barros writes, “because this was the most beautiful and powerful armada that had ever left the kingdom for lands so far away.”³⁸

Cabral commanded thirteen ships and between 1,200 and 1,500 men, among whom were captains, pilots, and clerks who had sailed with da Gama; sailors, priests, and interpreters (including the men from India whom Vasco da Gama had picked up on the first expedition to India, such as Gaspar da Gama); and twenty *degredados*.³⁹ Cabral carried letters from King Manuel to the East African kings of Sofala, Quíloa (today Tanzania), and Melinde (today Malindi, Kenya) and to the zamorin of Calicut.⁴⁰ The fleet sailed the next day.

Cabral's every act in Brazil several weeks later makes clear sense when seen against the backdrop of how the Portuguese operated when faced with new peoples and new lands. Cabral's captains were not only highly experienced sailors; they understood the dangers in contacting new and unfamiliar peoples. Cabral searched for a common language, using the translators in the armada for the first contact with the peoples he met in Brazil. When a common language did not emerge, he and his captains carefully avoided potentially dangerous behaviors and used music, singing, and humor as a means of communication. From Caminha's letter, it is clear that Cabral entrusted contact to his most experienced captains: Nicolau Coelho (who earlier had captained one of the ships led by da Gama); Bartolomeu Dias (the discoverer of the Cape of Good Hope); and Dias'

brother, Diogo Dias (who had been a clerk on da Gama's voyage). Coelho was the first sent ashore with interpreters to make contact, and he and Bartolomeu Dias are cited by Caminha as leaders of subsequent interactions. Dias' brother, Diogo, was the man sent ashore to dance and sing.

Cabral intended to use his *degradados* not only to protect his own expedition but to facilitate future contact. Caminha writes that Cabral's intention was simply to leave two men behind to learn the customs of the Indians. But Caminha's choice of words—*amansar* (to domesticate) and *apaizigar* (to pacify)—reveals that the Portuguese had long-term interests that required the cooperation of the peoples they encountered. Cabral introduced the men slowly, at first taking them to the Indians with gifts and then leaving them ashore while the rest of the Portuguese retired to the ships. Later he ordered the men to spend the night at the nearby Indian village. However, the Indians did not want these Portuguese young men to remain with them and several times forced the men to return to the ships. Despite these clear indications that the men were not welcome, Cabral left two *degradados* behind anyway. When Cabral's ships prepared to sail, the two men on the shore began to cry, perhaps revealing that they were not apprised of (or resigned to) their fate. The anonymous pilot or scribe wrote that the men of Brazil "comforted them and showed that they had pity for them." But they were not alone. According to Caminha, the night before Cabral weighed anchor, two seamen stole a skiff, left the ship, and were not seen again.⁴¹

Cabral immediately sent his supply ship back to Lisbon with the news of the discovery while he continued onward to India. He lost four ships after leaving Brazil when the armada had a very difficult time rounding the Cape of Good Hope. One more ship sank off the east coast of Africa. In spite of these setbacks, Cabral successfully negotiated with the king of Malindi in East Africa "through interpreters," and before sailing for Calicut, he left behind two more *degradados*. Cabral took with him an important political figure from Malindi, who was being sent to Lisbon by the ruler of a prosperous town along the Swahili coast to establish an amicable relationship with the king of Portugal. In Calicut, Cabral had the assistance of five South Asian interpreters whom Vasco da Gama had brought back to Portugal and who "spoke Portuguese well" by the time Cabral disembarked. But four of the South Asian interpreters brought by the Portuguese were of such low status that they could not approach the *zamorin*; the Portuguese had to rely instead on one interpreter who spoke Arabic. Since the language of communication was Arabic, the Portuguese again had to approach

the zamorin through Muslim go-betweens, whom they mistrusted. In Cabral's presence, the zamorin wrote two letters to King Manuel—one, an official document encased in a silver cover encrusted with a golden seal; the other, written on paper made from palm fronds.⁴²

The presence of transactional go-betweens masked conflicts that might surface during initial encounters. But the exchange of letters and ambassadors did not preclude the use of force, nor did it mean that the Portuguese always intended to trade peacefully. The Portuguese aspired to monopolize the spice trade to Europe, and that required the building of forts, the arming of ships, and the patrolling of sea-lanes. Cabral seized a Muslim ship and shelled Calicut when Muslim merchants impeded his attempts to trade. The Portuguese later would violently attack seaports, such as Goa in 1510, Malacca in 1511, and Hormuz in 1515. Eventually, the Portuguese built fifty forts in East Africa, India, and the Moluccas, and manned a fleet of one hundred ships to patrol the waters. The Portuguese seagoing ships (*naus*), armed with cannons and other artillery, gave the Portuguese a critical advantage over the existing traders. Interpreters played crucial roles in the early stages of contact, but the Portuguese did not rely solely on these transactional go-betweens to maintain their commercial interests in Africa and India.⁴³

The supply ship sent back from Brazil with letters from Cabral, his captains, and others reached Lisbon in 1501. In a private letter, Alberto Cantino, a Venetian living in Lisbon and an agent of a powerful Italian family, immediately wrote about the ship's return. He apparently had learned of the two *degradados* left behind in Brazil. In his letter to the Duke of Ferrara, Ercole d'Este, he comments that the Portuguese king hoped to encourage settlement in his new overseas possession by sending his *degradados* there. In his view, the "delectable airs" and "sweet fruits" of the newly discovered land known as Santa Cruz were such that few *degradados* would want to refuse.⁴⁴

Almost immediately King Manuel sent a small expedition to explore Brazil. There is persuasive evidence that these Portuguese mariners found the *degradados* who had been left behind by Cabral in 1500 and that at least one was able to serve as their interpreter. On this reconnoitering mission was Amerigo Vespucci, who supplied information to his patrons, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Piero di Tommaso Soderini, both powerful men in Florence, in detailed letters. One of Vespucci's letters, known as the *Lettera*, distinguishes between two very different encounters. The first meeting, which occurred just

as the expedition arrived in Brazil after an exhausting crossing in very stormy weather, was not successful due to the European crew's misreading of signs. Since there is no evidence that native peoples from Brazil returned to Portugal following Cabral's initial voyage, this first encounter occurred, as did Pinzón's and Cabral's in 1500, without an interpreter. The lack of an interpreter proved dangerous to the Portuguese.⁴⁵

This first meeting took place in northeastern Brazil, along the beach in present-day Rio Grande do Norte.⁴⁶ After sighting land, anchoring, and coming ashore, the men spotted a group of men and women watching them from a mountain vantage. Vespucci writes, "And although we took great pains with them that they might come and speak with us, we could never reassure them, for they did not trust us." Since the sailors badly needed water, firewood, and provisions, they left bells and mirrors on the ground where the Indians could find them and returned to their ships. Only when they were "far out at sea" did the Indians come down to the shore and take the goods. The next day, seeing smoke signals rising from the land, the sailors, "thinking that they were calling to us," went ashore. The Indians "made signs" that they should go inland, and Vespucci relates that two men volunteered to go with them "to see what kind of people they were and whether they had any wealth either of spices or of drugs." The men took trading goods and promised to return in five days. Seven days later, the two men had still not returned. A third man went ashore and, according to Vespucci, in full view of the men on the ships, was killed, dragged away, cooked, and eaten. Vespucci believed this to have been the fate of the two men who had left the expedition earlier.⁴⁷

The vivid story of a young man eaten in front of his companions may have been an embellishment added by Vespucci, or an editor, to achieve greater effect.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the story underscores an important point: without interpreters, the Portuguese could not count on achieving even simple objectives. Whereas Cabral's armada had successfully landed, drawn water, and traded, the first encounter on the second Portuguese expedition had not. A French expedition that reached Brazil three years later, in 1504, likewise had a difficult time establishing contact in northern Brazil. Sailing a single French ship navigated by two Portuguese sailors, the French captain Binot Paulmier de Gonneville landed on the coast of northeastern Brazil and found, according to a memoir of his voyage, Indians "naked as they emerged from the womb" with bodies painted black and pierced lips with "polished green stones" in the holes. These Indians

had already met Europeans, for they held European artifacts in their possession, and “although they showed no surprise at seeing the ship, they did show fear of the artillery.” At the first anchorage, when several unarmed men went ashore to get water, the Indians attacked, taking two captive, killing a third, and wounding four others. Paulmier de Gonneville did make a second landing 100 French leagues (approximately 445 kilometers) farther along the coast, where he was able to provision the ship and trade.⁴⁹

The crew of Vespucci’s expedition wanted to go ashore and avenge the deaths of their companions, but their captain prevented them and ordered the ships to sail. As the expedition hugged the northeastern shore, Vespucci writes, “we made many stops and never found people who wanted to parley with us.” Farther south, however, they made successful contact, which might have been facilitated by one of the *degredados* or sailors from the 1500 expedition. Vespucci reports that the expedition stayed five days with native people, and “although it took much effort to tame them, we nevertheless made them our friends and traded with them.” Vespucci does not mention where he “lived among the Indians for twenty-seven days,” as described in one letter. Instead, he says only that “we departed from this harbor sailing always to the southwest within sight of land, continually making many stops and speaking with countless people.” Possibly the harbor was the Bay of All Saints, which in one letter Vespucci claims was named during this expedition. It seems highly likely that wherever the expedition remained for a month, they had a *degredado* interpreter with them.⁵⁰

Amerigo Vespucci’s letters do not mention the *degredados* whom the expedition supposedly met, nor does he reference any translator. Yet the detail of his letters suggests that the expedition did find at least one *degredado* who had become skilled enough in the indigenous language to serve as interpreter. One wonders if Vespucci thought the presence of a translator so obvious that it did not need to be mentioned—in other words, that his readers would assume that they had a translator with them.⁵¹ In one letter he states that “we landed on several occasions and conversed in friendly fashion with the people” and that we “were warmly received by them, and sometimes stayed with them fifteen or twenty days at a time, always in a very friendly and hospitable way.” Yet Vespucci provides no explanation of how he was able to communicate. Or, he writes about how much he “learned” from the peoples of Brazil, without revealing how he could have understood them. For example, in his letter from 1502, he declares, “I strove hard to understand their life and customs, since I ate and slept among

them for twenty-seven days.” He then offers his reader a description of their houses, social structure, food, marriage and childbirth customs, warfare, and the presentation of their bodies—all in considerable detail. Many of these things he could have simply observed, but he also tells his reader that an old man “explained to him” or that “we strongly reproached them” or that the Indians “promised us,” suggesting that some form of verbal communication did take place.⁵²

Other sources do confirm that this second expedition to Brazil did find at least one *degredado* who served as an interpreter. The king’s notary stated in an official document that “two years after [1500], another fleet of the same Christian King [Manuel, of Portugal], with this as its goal, followed the coast of that land [Brazil] for almost 760 leagues [approximately 5,000 kilometers] and found amongst the people an interpreter and baptized countless numbers of them.” The notary attested in 1503 that the information that he had collected in a book had come from “the accounts of two old men of the said land [of Brazil],” with whom he communicated through interpreters—the *degredados* who had returned to Portugal from Brazil. A letter printed in Italy in 1505, purporting to be a copy of a letter sent by King Manuel of Portugal to the king of Castile, refers directly to the *degredados* left behind by Cabral in Brazil. This document, known as the “Besicken Letter,” states that the captain (Cabral) carried twenty condemned men, two of whom were left in Brazil, and that on another armada sent to Brazil by the king of Portugal one of the men returned, and “he spoke their language and gave information on everything.” The historian João de Barros likewise believed that one of the *degredados* returned to Lisbon; he wrote in his brief account of Cabral’s discovery of Brazil that “one of the two [*degredados*] later returned to this kingdom [of Portugal] and served as interpreter.”⁵³

While interpreters—the transactional go-betweens—facilitated contact, the first chroniclers of Brazil became influential representational go-betweens because they possessed a powerful new form of information, highly valuable to kings and merchants in Europe. Pero Vaz de Caminha became a representational go-between when he wrote his letter directly to the king. Clearly recognizing that he had seen things of particular interest to the king, and cognizant of the value of the information he passed on, he deemed it appropriate to ask, at the end of his letter, for a royal pardon for his son-in-law, who had been sent as a *degredado* to the island of São Tomé.⁵⁴

Caminha wrote to the king of Portugal, but others passed or sold their information to powerful figures outside of Portugal. Vespucci played this role to the

hilt by relaying detailed information on Brazil to his patron in Florence, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici. In the first letter, he begins by noting that "much time has passed since I last wrote to Your Magnificence," indicating that he had written before, and continues, saying, "the present letter is to give you the news." Vespucci confidently predicts that "Your Magnificence will be pleased to hear of all that took place on the voyage, and the most marvelous things I encountered upon it." The next year, en route to Brazil in 1501, he wrote from the Cape Verde Islands to pass on that he had met part of Cabral's fleet returning from India. This letter describes in considerable detail what he had learned from an informant from one of the ships and concludes with a list of all the goods stowed onboard. When he returned from Brazil, he wrote again, carefully describing the peoples of Brazil.⁵⁵

Vespucci is only the most well known of these representational go-betweens; there were many others. It was sensational news when the first ships from Cabral's fleet returned from India in 1502, and the news quickly left Portugal. Immediately after the first of the ships in Cabral's armada arrived in Lisbon from India, the Italian merchant Giovanni Affaitadi interviewed a sailor from the ship; two days later he had written a full account of Cabral's voyage to India for the Venetian ambassador to Spain. After reading the letter, the ambassador, Domenico Pisani de Giovanni, promptly forwarded the letter to the Doge of Venice. Pisani's own secretary, who was in Lisbon when the ship arrived, wrote to the Doge one day later, including in his letter a key piece of information that Affaitadi had missed: Cabral's discovery of Brazil. "Above the Cape of Good Hope, towards the west," he wrote, "they discovered a new land, that which they call 'of the parrots' . . . they judged this land to be mainland because they saw more than 2,000 miles of coast and did not find an end." The Venetian government quickly sent an agent to Portugal to gather more information.⁵⁶

Information spread rapidly, in part because there were so many sailors with stories of adventure to tell. Soon after Portuguese ships began to visit India, European merchants doing business in Lisbon learned quickly about the new trading routes. Some Venetians feared that the Portuguese maritime route to India would wrest the lucrative spice trade away from them. One Florentine merchant, long resident in Lisbon, estimated in 1501 that the Portuguese could easily supply the west, meaning Europe, with spices, and even Italy, for the sea route was less expensive than the overland route through the Middle East. Venetian merchants had built fortunes by acquiring these spices from Muslim

merchants in Cairo and Damascus and introducing them into Europe through Venice. Girolamo Priuli, a Venetian, remarked pessimistically in his diary in August and September of 1501 that the talk on the Rialto was the news of the new route that the Portuguese had navigated to the Orient and whether or not it would be the ruin of Venice. Even though some Venetians thought that Cabral's expedition had not been such a success, since so many ships had been lost and because the actual quantity of spices that made its way back to Lisbon was small, Priuli disagreed. He noted that it was not the amount of spices that Cabral's ships initially brought back; rather, "the importance was the route that had been found and the traffic, which every year will bring back greater quantities of spices."⁵⁷

Merchants not based in Venice were quick to see opportunity in the new route. One was the Frenchman Binot Paulmier de Gonneville, who, in Lisbon in 1501 or 1502, was amazed at the spices and other exotic goods that Portuguese merchants were unloading from their ships. With two partners, he decided to outfit a ship, and they hired two Portuguese pilots at great expense to help the French crew find its way to India. Gonneville's ship, *L'Espoir*, never reached India, but it was the French ship that did land in Brazil in 1504.⁵⁸

Recognizing the value of information possessed even by sailors on ships, the kings of Portugal may have tried to limit the flow of information about the Portuguese Empire. The Portuguese pioneered new navigational techniques and mapped thousands of miles of previously unknown coastlines, yet virtually all of the maps drawn for Prince Henry, King Afonso, King João II, and King Manuel have disappeared, and there are relatively few known Portuguese maps from the sixteenth century. The absence of such maps has led historians to claim that there was a royal policy of concealment. They argue that King João II cloaked the discoveries by Portuguese mariners, and especially the maps they used to navigate, in secrecy, as did his successor, King Manuel.⁵⁹

According to Portuguese cartographic historian Armando Cortesão, there is little doubt that the maps existed, for the information they carried is reflected in other European maps drawn in the fifteenth century. For example, on the world map drawn by Fra Mauro in 1457–1459 appears a legend that reads: "His Highness the King of Portugal sent his ships [and sea captains] to discover and to see with their own eyes . . . and they [the sea captains] made new maps of these voyages and they gave new names to the rivers and coasts, capes and ports, of all of which I had a copy."⁶⁰

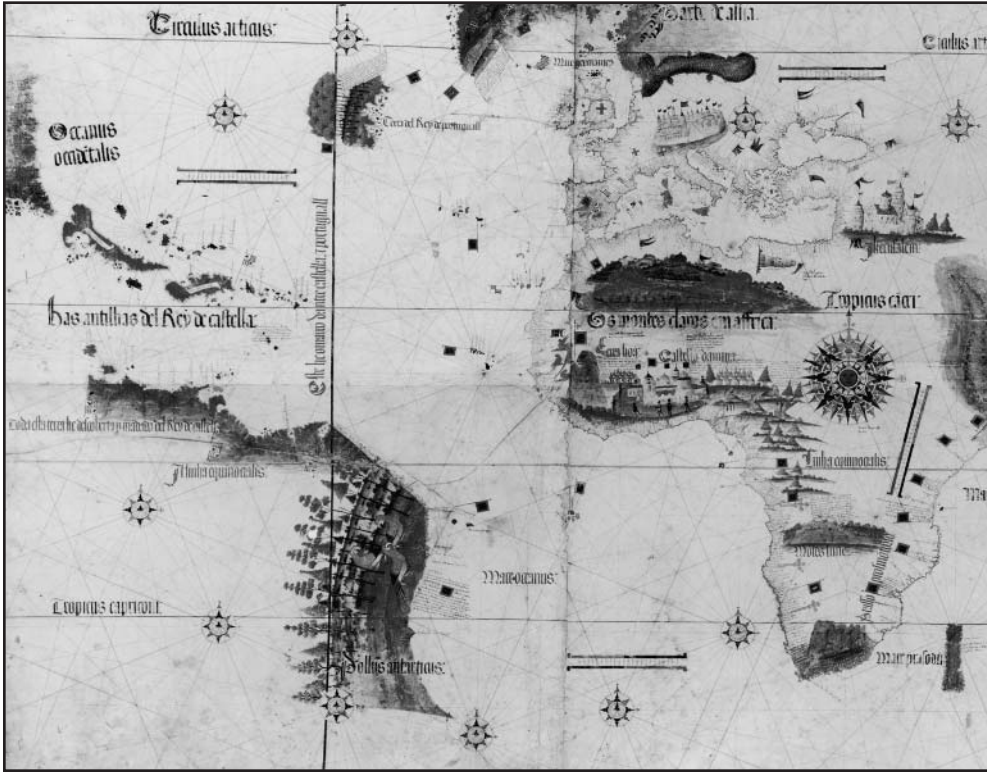
Vespucci often alludes to "a small work" that he was writing, but that he was unable to send to his Florentine patron because King Manuel of Portugal had

taken it from him. “When he returns it to me,” Vespucci wrote optimistically to his patron, “I shall send it.” Vespucci again referred to this work in a later letter, this time reiterating to his patron that “I ask your forgiveness for not sending you this last navigation, or rather this last ‘journey,’ as I had promised to do in my last letter: you know the reason, since I could not yet have the original back from His Most Serene Highness [King Manuel of Portugal].” But more recent scholarship questions the existence of a policy of secrecy, or at least its effectiveness, since so much information on the new discoveries rapidly left Portugal.⁶¹

In Portugal, as later in Spain, there was a *padrão real*, or a “master map” kept by the king; on this map, cartographers recorded all new discoveries and all new information as soon as it reached the king. Through the shrewd agency, and perhaps bribery, of diplomatic agents and spies, the Venetian Alberto Cantino somehow managed to have an artist in Lisbon copy a Portuguese nautical chart that showed the new Atlantic discoveries of Cabral, as well as recent discoveries in India (Map 2.2). According to Cortesão, it is highly likely that Cantino’s map was copied directly from the *padrão real*, kept in Lisbon. How Cantino got access to this map is unknown, but Cortesão states that Cantino paid twelve gold ducats for the map and sent it to his patron in November of 1502.⁶²

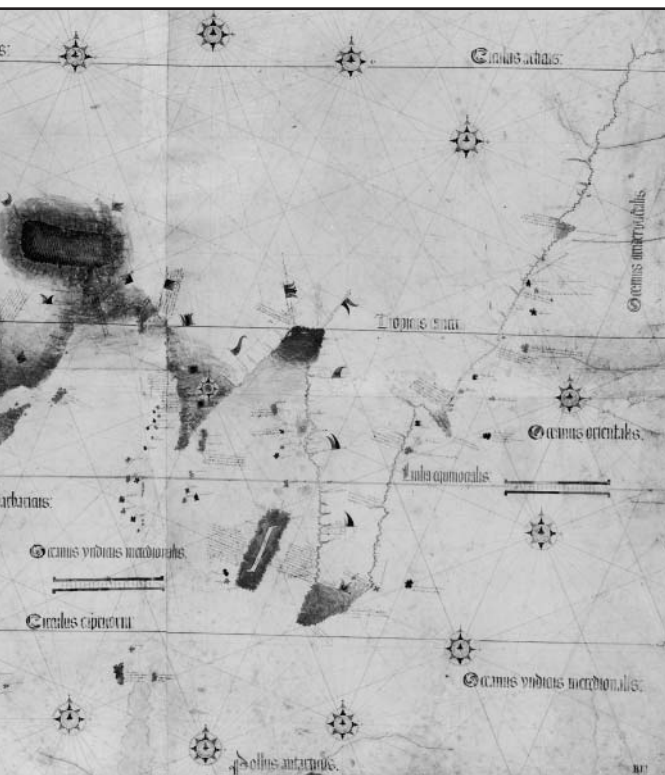
The Cantino World Map provides fascinating insights into the Portuguese mapmakers, who were representational go-betweens, translating new information into a dramatic new vision of the world. The map is itself extraordinary. The careful detail that it reveals about the world reflects the combined knowledge of one hundred years of Portuguese navigation and discovery. The entire coast of West Africa is clearly drawn and fully named. This is not surprising, for Portuguese ships had sailed to such ports for decades. But the east coast of Africa, only recently navigated by Portuguese sea captains, as well as India, are also drawn in considerable and confident detail. Even more striking is the location of places that the Portuguese had not yet seen—China, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The Cantino World Map, according to Luís de Albuquerque and J. Lopes Tavares, was the first to deviate from the traditional representation of Asia based on the work of the classical geographer Ptolemy.⁶³ Instead, the Cantino World Map combined information from European sailors, pilots, and navigators with information obtained in India from Muslims to represent Asia in a radically new way. The map reflects the acquisition of information from Muslim pilots and traders, whom the Portuguese met in East Africa and India, about ports farther east—in China, Malaysia, and Japan. The Muslim merchants had their own



navigational strategies, which the Portuguese learned and translated into their own system. This information, deemed more important than the classical model of Asia drawn from Ptolemy, created the highly original, and far more accurate, projection of Asia.

Reflecting the Portuguese cartographic tradition, which stressed that maps should record only what was known (and not imagined), only the coastline of Brazil appears on the Cantino World Map. The mapmakers paint Brazil as a landscape of parrots and trees, but they make no effort to project it as a continent. The coastline seems to float unconnected to the islands of the Caribbean, which, by 1502, were well known in Spain and Portugal. Brazil is located quite precisely between the equator and the Tropic of Capricorn. The placement of the Portuguese flag and the clearly drawn line of demarcation between the Spanish and Portuguese discoveries claim Brazil for Portugal. According to Cortesão, the coast of Brazil was redrawn in the Cantino World Map, and a second, updated version was pasted over the original. The first version, no longer visible to the naked eye, names only two places along the coast of Brazil: Porto



Map 2.2. The Cantino World Map, 1502. Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena.

Seguro and the Cabo de São Jorge. The second version, the one visible today, contains these two place-names in addition to the names of two rivers (the São Francisco River and the Rio do Brasil), a second cape—Cabo de Santa Maria—and two place-names: the Bay of All Saints and San Miguel. Cortesão suggests that this correction reflects the new information that had arrived in Lisbon from the 1501–1502 voyage (Map 2.3).⁶⁴

In addition to the named places on the Cantino World Map, there appear legends, written in script, that describe the wealth of the lands, information about when they were discovered, and accounts of the people who lived in them. Opposite the *feitoria* (trading post) of São Jorge da Mina in West Africa, a legend reads:

Whence they bring to the most excellent prince Dom Manuel King of Portugal in each year twelve caravels with gold; each caravel brings twenty-five thousand weights of gold, each weight being worth five hundred *reis*, and they further bring many slaves and pepper and other things of much profit.⁶⁵



Map 2.3. Brazil as represented in the Cantino World Map, 1502. Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena.

This was not particularly new information, but the recording of the exact number of ships, the amount of gold, and the value of each weight suggests the value accorded to concrete information coveted by merchants. Many legends appear

in the map opposite India; for example, next to Calicut the legend states, “Here is Calicut, a most noble city discovered by the most illustrious prince King Dom Manuel of Portugal. There is much *benzoin* [balsam] . . . and pepper and many other kinds of merchandise coming from many parts, to wit, cinnamon, ginger, clove, incense, sandalwood, and all kinds of spices and stones of great value . . . and seed pearls.” Legends also appear beside places that the Portuguese had not yet visited but had heard of—Sumatra, Malacca, Cambodia, China, and the Malay Peninsula. These legends record valuable information obtained from merchants in India and sure to be of interest for Portuguese merchants interested in trade.⁶⁶

The legend off the coast of Brazil reflects no information about possible trading relations; rather, it is a succinct characterization of the discovery of Brazil, then known as the Land of the True Cross, and a brief description of the peoples living there:

Found by Pedro Álvares Cabral, a nobleman of the house of the king of Portugal, who discovered it when he went as captain-major of fourteen ships which the said king was sending to Calicut. . . . there are many people who go about naked as their mothers delivered them; they are more white than brown and have very long hair.⁶⁷

Kings, noblemen, and merchants valued the information coming from these new lands, but so, too, did a much wider readership. The letters of Amerigo Vespucci became a widely read source of information about Brazil. Two of Vespucci’s letters were published during his lifetime; these letters became extremely influential in shaping how Europeans perceived these recent discoveries. One, addressed to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, was printed in 1502 or 1503 and “enjoyed an immediate and lasting renown,” becoming known as the *Mundus novus* letter, for in it the term “New World” was popularized for the first time. The second, printed in Florence in 1504 or 1505, known as the *Lettera*, is addressed to a “Magnificent Lord,” whom scholars believe to be Piero di Tommaso Soderini, successor on the death of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici to the office of Gonfalonier of Justice (the head of the Florentine Republic).⁶⁸

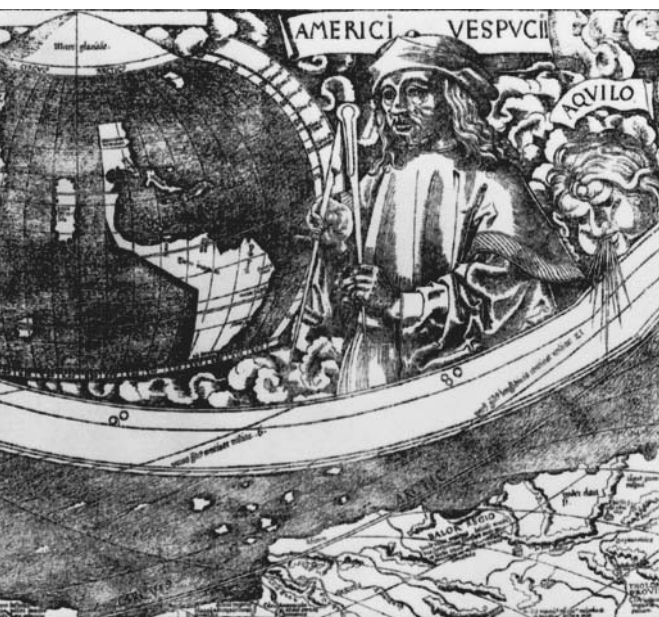
Vespucci’s letters reflect the challenges that the discovery of the Americas posed for the European view of the world. Vespucci’s *Mundus novus* letter directly contradicts the ancient authorities in their geographic depiction of the world. Vespucci argues that the classical geographers erred in their view that there was



no continent in the Atlantic south of the equator. After the salutation, the letter begins, “But this last voyage of mine has demonstrated that this opinion of theirs [the ancients] is false and contradicts all truth, since I have discovered a continent in those southern regions that is inhabited by more numerous peoples and animals than in our Europe, or Asia or Africa.”⁶⁹

The German popularity of the letter brought it to the attention of the map-maker Martin Waldseemüller, who used Vespucci’s accounts to name America in his magnificent map of the world published in 1507. Waldseemüller makes Vespucci the modern (i.e., sixteenth-century) heir to the great classical cartographer Ptolemy. Vespucci appears at the upper right, next to the modern discoveries of the “new” world, whereas the ancient authority, Ptolemy, appears to the left, next to the “old” world he had mapped. Though Waldseemüller acknowledges the new information supplied by the Portuguese discoveries in his depiction of Africa and the coast of Brazil, he remains wedded to Ptolemy’s representation of Asia. As compared to the Cantino World Map, Waldseemüller’s representation of Asia is less accurate because it is based on classical cartography rather than on the information supplied by seamen and merchants (Map 2.4).

Waldseemüller is quick to imagine and to name America; he gives Vespucci’s name to the new world, not Columbus’, not Cabral’s, not Pinzón’s. Because

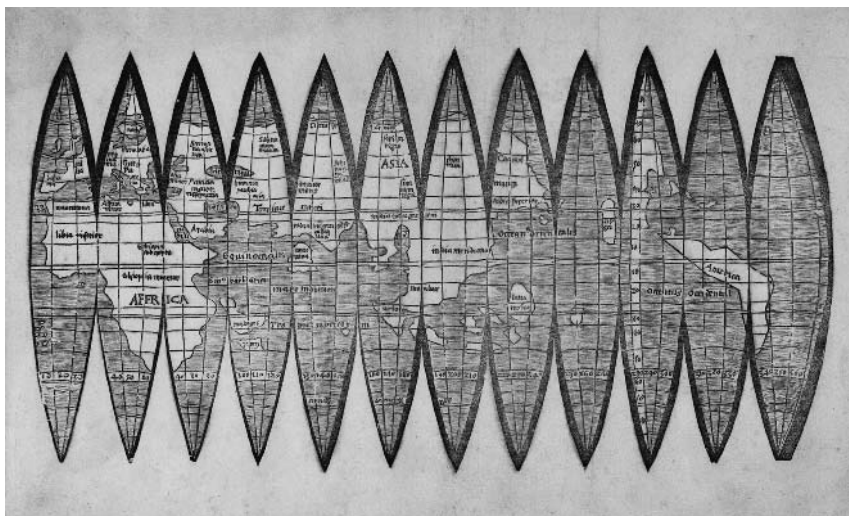


Map 2.4. Waldseemüller's World Map, 1507. Martin Waldseemüller, *Universalis Cosmographia Secundum Ptholemaei Traditionem Et Americi Vespucii Aliorumque Lustrationes* (St. Die, 1507). Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Vespucci popularized the information of the new world in the old, Waldseemüller gives him credit for the discovery, whether or not he rightfully deserved the honor. On Waldseemüller's wall map, as on his globe gores, America is assigned prominently to the lands that Vespucci had written about (Map 2.5).⁷⁰

Letters and chronicles, translated into several languages, disseminated information, perceptions, and interpretations about America to a large European public. So, too, did some of the first visual images of the Americas. A few maps circulated to a general public, and on these maps appeared miniature scenes of the landscape and customs of the Americas and its peoples. Woodcuts—black and white or crudely colored—accompanied the publication of letters and chronicles. Invariably, these visual images portrayed cannibalism as the defining feature of life in Brazil.

References to cannibalism appeared in Vespucci's first letter about Brazil (1502) when he writes that "they dismember and eat their dead enemies" and when he elaborates that "we bought ten creatures from them, both males and females, who were destined for sacrifice." Vespucci saw cannibalism as primarily a form of nourishment. He declares, "the meat they most commonly eat is human flesh," and "they take captives and keep them, not to spare them, but to kill them for food," or "human flesh is common fare among them." He superimposes on the



Map 2.5. Waldseemüller's globe gores showing America, 1507. From the collection of the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

peoples of Brazil the ways that meats are prepared in Europe. He writes, “in their houses we found human flesh hung up for smoking,” and “I saw salted human flesh hanging from house-beams, much as we hang up bacon and pork.”⁷¹

One of the German editions of Vespucci's *Mundus novus* letter carried a broadsheet depicting cannibalism in Brazil. The colored woodcut portrays Brazilian men, women, and children adorned with beautiful feathers around their waists and ankles, but this exotic scene also features a man gnawing on a human arm; a human head, leg, and arm hanging from the beams of a hut over an open fire; and a human leg resting on a table (Fig. 2.1). The text matter-of-factly states that “[t]hey eat each other, those that they kill. They place that flesh in fire.”⁷²

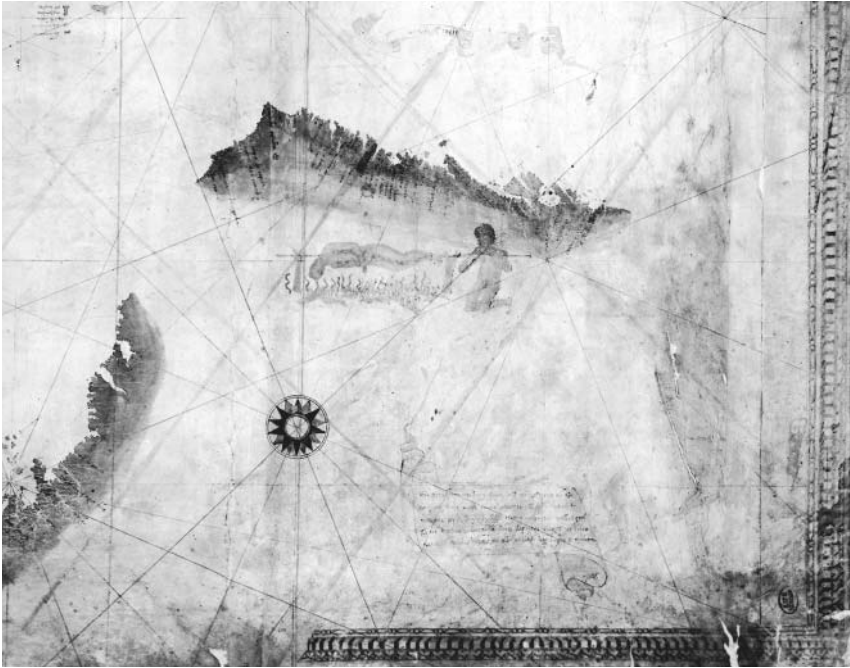
The visual depiction of a human skewered as a pig might be for roasting made its way onto one of the earliest depictions of Brazil, the anonymous world map drawn between 1502 and 1506, known as the “Kunstmann II” (Map 2.6). Believed by scholars to be an Italian copy of a Portuguese original, this map records information known as a result of Vespucci's expedition of 1501–1502. Whereas kings are drawn in Africa, as is the case opposite the feitoria of São Jorge da Mina, Brazil is portrayed pictographically with a lurid picture of a body being roasted whole over an open fire. The body is thought to be that of a white European, the crew member who went ashore and was killed and eaten in front

of his companions, as related by Vespucci or by Pietro Martire d'Anghiera. The vividness of the drawing, coupled with errors in the presentation of cannibalism, suggests, according to Suzi Colin, that the illustrator “probably based his portrayal on accounts that had been embellished by various intermediaries.” Such intermediaries might have heard stories from eyewitnesses—sailors or merchants—who had seen cannibalism.⁷³

The rapid dissemination of cannibalistic images and descriptions of Brazil through printed books, maps, and engravings created a shared image of Brazil that was held by Europeans of very different backgrounds and nations. Waldseemüller's giant world map of 1516 depicted cannibalism as a defining feature of Brazil. This map sold so well that a second edition appeared in 1525, and according to one scholar, it became “one of the most influential representations of Indians in Renaissance map illustration.”⁷⁴ Lurid depictions of cannibals feasting on human flesh sold well in Europe and reflected the power of the representational go-betweens to shape the image of Brazil in the imaginations of Europeans. By reducing Brazilians to simplified caricatures, it proved to be easy to rationalize their exploitation.



Figure 2.1. Illustration depicting cannibalism, 1505. Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.



Map 2.6. Anonymous—Brazil as represented on the “Kunstmann II” World Map, 1505–1506. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München.

European men, serving as sailors, dominated the roles of physical go-betweens during the time of exploration and first encounters. But not all physical go-betweens during this time were Europeans. Native Brazilians sailed across the Atlantic, as did Africans. Taking captives back to Portugal was a custom followed by the Portuguese in Africa, and indeed, it is not surprising to see it adopted in Brazil, even though Cabral’s captains did not elect to do so. When Columbus returned to Spain after his first voyage, he had with him at least seven Indians whom he intended to train as interpreters. Vicente Yáñez Pinzón carried thirty or thirty-six Indians from Brazil back to Spain in 1500. Anghiera describes these Indians as “captives”; most of them certainly became slaves in Spain, including one who might have been used as an interpreter. After describing a successful encounter with the Indians of Brazil, Vespucci writes that “we decided to take a couple of men from this place to teach us their language, and three volunteered to come with us to Portugal.” Similarly, the report of the French ship captained by Binot Paulmier de Gonneville that landed in Brazil in 1504 notes

that taking natives to Europe was a common procedure. "And because it is a custom," the report states, "among those who visit the new lands in the Indies, to take a few Indians back to Christendom, so it was done."⁷⁵

Native Americans were objects of great wonder in Lisbon and other European ports. An expedition to North America led by Gaspar Corte-Real returned with more than fifty men, women, and children. Alberto Cantino wrote to his Italian patron, the Duke of Ferrara. "These people," he commented, "I saw and touched and contemplated." Gonneville took the son of Guarani chief Arosca back to France with him. Arosca agreed to allow his son, a youth named Essomericq, to leave on Gonneville's ship, along with a companion, a man of thirty-five to forty years named Namoa. Apparently Gonneville promised that Essomericq and Namoa would return in "twenty moons" with knowledge of artillery, which Arosca greatly desired in order to defeat his enemies, as well as how to make "mirrors, knives, axes, and all the things that they saw and admired of the Christians." At a subsequent stop in northern Brazil, the French captain attempted to take two more Indians from Brazil, but the two men jumped overboard at night and, to the amazement of the crew, swam three French leagues (*lieües*; approximately 13 kilometers) back to shore.⁷⁶

Albrecht Dürer, who was fascinated by the new peoples and things appearing in European ports, most probably saw some of these native Brazilians taken to Europe. In the illustrated prayer book *Das Gebetbuch Kaiser Maximilians*, opposite the twenty-fourth psalm, Dürer draws a man wearing a feather skirt and a feather collar, and holding a feathered club; above is a large bird, perhaps a toucan (Fig. 2.2). Although positive identification is not possible, scholars do believe that the similarities between this drawing and other examples of Tupi featherwork and depictions of Brazilian Indians make it possible that Dürer intended this man to represent the Tupi peoples of Brazil.⁷⁷

Although Africans, Asians, and Americans crossed the Atlantic, and in increasing numbers with the advent of the slave trade, they sailed in ships built in Europe with European technology, under the command of European sea captains, and in the service of European kings or powerful European merchants. The roles of the early physical go-betweens therefore were dominated by Europeans. This gave the Portuguese a tremendous initial advantage in their relations with the new peoples they met and with whom they intended to trade. Thus, even when Africans and Americans became physical and transactional go-betweens, they most often did so under the control of the Portuguese.



Figure 2.2. A Tupi Indian? *Das Gebetbuch Kaiser Maximilians*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München.

Ordinary sailors, banished criminals, translators, chroniclers, and mapmakers all became go-betweens in the European process of “discovering” and “encountering” Brazil. As we have seen, the Portuguese experience in Africa directly shaped how Portuguese sea captains, merchants, and the Crown perceived Brazil. For nearly a century, the Portuguese had relied on go-betweens to explore, to encounter new peoples, and to develop trade. And go-betweens continued to be at the center of Portugal’s first attempts to possess Brazil.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

3. *Possession*

Kill him and eat him, the good-for-nothing, for he is indeed a Portuguese,
your enemy and mine.

Karwattuware, a French interpreter

The magnificent Reinel Map of Brazil (1519) proudly declares the Portuguese claim to Brazil (Map 3.1). Offshore ride two beautifully drawn Portuguese naus, the large oceangoing ships that by 1519 sailed regularly to India, each marked with the bold red crosses that symbolized the Portuguese Order of Christ, which since the days of Prince Henry the Navigator had financed and benefited from overseas trade and exploration. Between two Portuguese flags marking the northern and southern limits of Brazil, a detailed and accurately drawn coastline names more than one hundred bays, inlets, and rivers, reflecting the work of Portuguese mariners and cartographers. Over the unknown interior of Brazil, the miniaturist presents a vignette that represents the peoples and landscape of Brazil. The legend that appears at the top of the map proclaims in Latin, the lingua franca of the educated European elite, that “[t]his is the chart of the region of Great Brazil and on the western side it reaches the Antilles of the King of Castile,” and toward the bottom of the map, the land is formally named on a red scroll: “Terra Brasilis” (Land of Brazil).¹

One easily reads Reinel’s map as a “representation” of the Portuguese possession of Brazil. The flags, the ships, the naming of places all convey to the viewer the Portuguese claim to Brazil. Like other Portuguese maps in the sixteenth century, the Reinel Map simultaneously reflects two kinds of information: that delivered by the physical go-betweens—the homens do mar—who explored by sea, and that supplied by the representational go-betweens who, as cartographers, translated the collected data into a new vision of the world. Although



Map 3.1. The Reinel Map, 1519. *L'Atlas Miller*, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

it would seem that the Reinel Map documents the Portuguese possession of Brazil, the reality was quite different. By 1519, when the map was drawn, France and Spain competed with Portugal to claim parts of Brazil, a fact that the map minimizes. More important is the obvious fact that sea captains and cartographers had reconnoitered only the coast of Brazil; the interior was still unknown. There were hundreds of indigenous chiefs whom Europeans—whether Portuguese, French, or Spanish—had never met, and the dense coastal forests were filled with flora and fauna unfamiliar to Europeans. Brazil could be discovered, observed, and mapped, but such a representation did not translate into possession. Possession required the presence of transactional go-betweens—who appear nowhere on this exquisite map.

The beauty of the Reinel Map lies with the work of the miniaturist, who depicts a vision of life in Brazil that portrays the Portuguese dream of possession. Choosing a palette of greens to paint the verdant forests of Brazil, and using rules of perspective to suggest the depth and height of the wooded landscape, the miniaturist re-creates Brazil as if it were a stage. On this stage appear a meandering river, cliffs, clearings, and men, parrots, monkeys, jaguars, and even a dragon. Eight men, but no women or children, are deemed important enough to be drawn; some of the men hold poses as actors might, while others are busily engaged in activity. Four of the men might be chiefs, as evidenced by their wearing of feather headdresses, similar to crowns, and long skirts and capes fashioned from brilliant red and blue parrot feathers. Huge parrots—blue, red, and olive green—swoop down from the tree canopy. But though the trees are tall, the forests are not thick, and all the stands of trees show evidence of cutting. Four naked men are chopping, stacking, loading, and hauling enormous logs. The legend summarizes in words what the miniaturist has painted: “Its people are somewhat dark in colour. . . . These same people are most skillful in the use of bow and arrows.” The legend concludes with a reference to the logging, which by 1519 was the primary export of Brazil: “and there grows in great quantity the tree called brazil, which is considered proper for dyeing clothes in purple.”²

Brazilwood (*Caesalpinia echinata*) grew in the Atlantic forests, and when soaked, produced a reddish purple dye much in demand in Europe.³ The Portuguese intent to possess this valuable commodity is one of the dominant messages of the map. But the miniaturist and the map’s legend suggest that its possession will not be easy. The legend characterizes the peoples of Brazil as “savage and very cruel,” and states as a matter of fact that “they feed on human flesh.” The miniaturist does not emphasize cannibalism in his depiction of the inhabitants of Brazil, but a smudged, triangular shape in the northeast hints at it. Similar to a pictograph that often appears on later maps—wood stacked in the shape of a teepee, with fingers of fire consuming human body parts—it is possibly a direct reference to the place in northern Brazil where one of Vespucci’s comrades was killed and eaten in front of his companions.

If mapmakers did not immediately perceive the importance of transactional go-betweens, practical merchants interested in the brazilwood trade quickly did. Even a trade in a simple export, such as tree logs, required negotiation, for merchants well knew that dreams of riches required agents on the ground. The Portuguese Crown drew on its long experience in Africa to develop rules for the

brazilwood trade, as did ordinary sea captains and merchants. To facilitate first contacts, sea captains continued to use strategies that had worked well in Africa, such as seizing indigenous boys and men to train as interpreters, and leaving behind expendable European men, such as *degredados*. Later, the Crown and merchants came to rely on resident middlemen in Brazil, who devised roles for themselves that resembled patterns that had emerged in Africa.

In the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century African trade, European and mixed-race men known as *lançados* and *tangomaos* became important negotiators. According to Walter Rodney, the term “*lançado*” derives from the verb *lançar* (to throw), meaning that these Portuguese men had thrown themselves into the African world, and “*tangomaos*” referred to traders who had tattooed their bodies in the African style. *Lançados* and *tangomaos* were initially Portuguese and later Portuguese and/or mulatto men who lived in African communities and served as the middlemen between African chiefs and Portuguese traders. Another historian sees them as the “spearhead of Portuguese penetration” in Africa, India, and Brazil and argues that in many regions, it was only through them that the Portuguese were able to retain their commercial interests.⁴

The *lançados* come into focus after the initial phase of exploration and contact in Africa, a time when the first interpreters and colonists had been forced into their roles—serving as slave interpreters or penal exiles. As time passed, *degredados* and translators carved out roles for themselves that compensated for their marginal social status in the Portuguese world, and they found ways to create for themselves considerable independence and autonomy in the African world. *Lançados* lived in inland villages, as guests of African chiefs, and typically were married to one of the chief’s women. The *lançado* was expected to follow the laws and customs of the region and to submit himself to the sovereignty of the chief. As a result, the Portuguese Crown and its agents had little control over the *lançados*. In the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese Crown began to legislate against these traders by issuing laws and decrees that forbade unlicensed traders from the Guinea coast and banned direct trade between the Cape Verde Islands and Guinea. However, these measures did little to stop the *lançados*, who were essential to trade.⁵

Over time, descendants of the *lançados* continued in their roles as middlemen on the Guinea coast, even after the Portuguese had long since been replaced by other European traders. Mulatto go-betweens continued to trade on a large scale, in slaves for Europeans and in goods destined for Africans—salt, cloth,

dyes, kola nuts, palm oil, and rice. Of them, Walter Rodney writes that “the Afro-Portuguese acted as interpreters, and carried out all the tasks of middlemen in coastal trade, from acting as pilots on the rivers to serving as commercial advisers to the local ruling class.”⁶

Although the Portuguese Crown regretted the independent roles that such transactional go-betweens had established for themselves in Africa, a similar situation emerged in Brazil.⁷ European men who “went native” became the primary transactional go-betweens in the early brazilwood trade. Such men found themselves in Brazil for a variety of reasons: some came as agents of merchants; others, as *degredados*. A few deliberately jumped ship or had survived shipwrecks. All these men had to ally themselves with indigenous groups in order to survive; if they did, they had the potential to broker the economic and political relationships between coastal Indians and Europeans. Later, men of mixed race—the Brazilian *mestizos* (of mixed Indian and Portuguese parentage) known as *mamelucos*—dominated this role, as mulatto men had done in Africa.

Transactional go-betweens would fill a void in the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, as they had in Africa, where, lacking administrators for its far-flung empire, the Crown had relied on *lançados* and *tangomaos*. The dependence on such intermediaries, however, was not always in the Crown’s long-term interests. The *prazeiros* of Mozambique are examples of transactional go-betweens who, though seeing themselves as *conquistadores* (conquistadors) for the king of Portugal, nevertheless adopted many of the cultural characteristics of the African groups with whom they intermarried. The descendants of the *prazeiros* shifted their loyalties from the Portuguese world to the African and, in the nineteenth century, resisted Portuguese influence by attacking Portuguese administrative centers and Portuguese trade.⁸ Similarly, transactional go-betweens in Brazil might initially serve the Portuguese Crown, but over time they might develop their own interests, which did not always square with those of the Crown.

The roles of transactional go-betweens in the brazilwood trade are only dimly visible in the few documents known to historians that describe the trade in the early sixteenth century. Those documents reveal that what became known as the “brazilwood coast” extended from Cabo Frio, just east of present-day Rio de Janeiro, to Paraíba, north of Pernambuco. The Portuguese Crown immediately perceived the value of the brazilwood trade and quickly decreed it to be a royal monopoly. Merchants who wished to trade for the wood had to have a contract from the king. King Manuel granted the initial rights to brazilwood in

contracts reminiscent of those granted in Africa. An Italian living in Seville in 1502 thought this news important enough that he provided details about it in a letter that described the arrival of seven ships from India that year. A consortium of Portuguese merchants received a contract for brazilwood and slaves, Pedro Rondinelli wrote, which required them to send six ships a year to Brazil to further explore the coast and to build a fort. News of the trade appears in Vespucci's letters as well. He writes that on his second trip to Brazil, which took place between 1503 and 1504, he spent five months 260 leagues (approximately 1,600 kilometers) from the Bay of All Saints, loading brazilwood and building a fort. In this spot, he claims to have left twenty-four men behind in the fort with munitions and provisions for six months. A Venetian report on the Portuguese regulations on the spice trade, penned in 1505, described the volume of the brazilwood trade as 20,000 *quintais* (hundredweights) per year, most of it destined for Flanders, Spain, and Italy, valued at 2.5 to 3 ducats per *quintal* (hundredweight). The monopoly of the brazilwood trade cost the Portuguese merchant Fernando de Noronha the sizable sum of 4,000 ducats per year; one observer estimated that Noronha made, on average, one ducat per quintal.⁹

The French quickly became involved in the brazilwood trade, too. The French sea captain Binot Paulmier de Gonneville, who arrived in southern Brazil in 1504, traded for brazilwood on his return. But it is unlikely that he was the first French trader in Brazil. The report of Gonneville's voyage explicitly states that on the return voyage, when the crew realized that they were near the place where French sea captains from Normandy traded for brazilwood, they decided to land and to barter for dyewood. At the first place they anchored, however, the Indians refused to trade, but at a second anchorage, they found Indians who would exchange brazilwood and food for European merchandise.¹⁰

The brazilwood trade developed two distinct patterns, one generally characteristic of the Portuguese, the other of the French. Both depended on transactional go-betweens experienced in Brazil. The Portuguese trade in brazilwood replicated a pattern that the Portuguese had established in Africa: merchants who held contracts from the king traded at a few established *feitorias* (fortified trading posts) built along the coast. In the French style, ships landed and traded, but no permanent forts were built. In both patterns of trade, brazilwood was not the only commodity of interest to the Europeans; peppers, feathers, exotic animal skins, monkeys, parrots, medicinal oils, and Indian slaves were also purchased in Brazil with European trading goods.

The Portuguese brazilwood trade took place in feitorias, where a resident factor supervised the trade. Cristovão Jacques established one such trading post for the king in Pernambuco, and another was located farther south at Cabo Frio. Merchants sent ships, such as the *Bretoa* that hailed the feitoria at Cabo Frio in 1511, to load cargoes of brazilwood. The captain of the *Bretoa* had been directed to submit to the factor once he arrived. "Above all things," his instructions read, "[you shall obey] the factor on the pain of losing your salary." Furthermore, the captain was warned to be vigilant with his crew and to permit them to go ashore only on the island where the trading post lay. By prohibiting the crew from visiting the mainland, the merchants clearly intended to prevent crew members, most of whom were unmarried and some of whom were slaves, from slipping away and remaining in Brazil, which apparently had happened on past trips. This, the captain's orders noted, was considered "odious to the trade and to the service of the King."¹¹

In the Portuguese brazilwood trade, only the factor was permitted to play the role of transactional go-between: only he negotiated over brazilwood with the Indians. Yet, it proved almost impossible to prevent the creation of other, rival transactional go-betweens. The trading post was a community of sorts, and the factor did not live alone. From the sources that describe a French attack on the Portuguese trading fort in Pernambuco in 1531, we learn that the feitoria had been founded thirty years earlier. In addition to its fort and trading warehouse, it included a church and houses where the agents and scribes of the king and of Portuguese merchants lived. While this small Portuguese community existed to facilitate the trade in brazilwood, slaves, cotton, cat skins, parrots, and medicinal oils from the trading post, clearly many in the Portuguese community had contact with the surrounding indigenous groups. Although details are slim, the Portuguese living there had established some sort of *modus vivendi* with neighboring Indians, for when the French attacked, the nearby Indians joined in the battle on the side of the Portuguese. The French succeeded in taking the trading post, but the French possession was short lived, as the Portuguese destroyed the fort in December 1531.¹²

Those who lived in the trading post, or who participated in the brazilwood trade as sailors or merchants, became candidates who, if they remained in Brazil, might become transactional go-betweens. One such man was João Lopes Carvalho, the pilot of the *Bretoa* when it visited Cabo Frio in 1511. At some point in his life, most likely after 1511 but before 1520, Carvalho lived in Brazil

for four years. In 1520, when Magellan sailed along the coast of Brazil during the first leg of his circumnavigation, Carvalho was the pilot of the *Concepción*. His son, by a Brazilian Indian woman, accompanied him. Carvalho served as intermediary during Magellan's brief but successful interactions along the coast of Brazil, where, according to Antonio Pigafetta, the crews had little difficulty provisioning their ships and trading for brazilwood. Pigafetta attributes to Carvalho an explanation of cannibalism that was possibly the first that explained to Europeans the meaning of the practice. "They eat the flesh of their enemies," Pigafetta recounts, "not as being good for food, but from custom." Moreover, he explains that the body is not eaten whole, but "piece by piece." These pieces were dried and eaten "with their ordinary food to call to mind their enemies."¹³

The French specialized in a more informal trade in brazilwood that was highly successful along the coast of Brazil. The French left men in Brazil known as *truchements* (interpreters), who lived with Indian groups and facilitated trade when merchant ships arrived, or French merchant ships carried their own interpreters, who negotiated with Indians for brazilwood. How this trade might have been initiated is visible in the log kept by the Portuguese mariner Pero Lopes de Sousa. In 1531, just south of Cabo Santo Agostinho, Indians swam out to the Portuguese ships and asked the crews if they were interested in brazilwood. As it was by now standard operating procedure for ships to have interpreters on board, Pero Lopes de Sousa had no difficulty understanding the Indians and communicating with them. However, Lopes de Sousa was not interested in brazilwood, as the ship he commanded was part of an armada that had a different mission from the Portuguese king, but to a French sea captain, such an overture might well have resulted in trade.¹⁴

The importance of go-betweens in this informal trade emerges in documents that reveal yet another competitor in the trade: the English. In the depositions given by the first known Englishmen engaged in piracy in the Americas appear references to interpreters and negotiators. The crew of the *Barbara* was tried for piracy on their return from a sea voyage that left Portsmouth in March 1540 and sailed along the coasts of Spain and Portugal, the Canary and Cape Verde Islands, Brazil, and Haiti before returning to England. Because the *Barbara* had attacked several Spanish ships on the voyage, the Spanish ambassador complained, and England's Lord High Admiral arrested the surviving crew members in 1541. The depositions from the trial reveal many details about the *Barbara*'s stay in Brazil.¹⁵

Three Englishmen owned the *Barbara*, but among her crew of one hundred served twelve Frenchmen, including her pilot, who hailed from Dieppe, a French port in Normandy traditionally involved in the brazilwood trade. When the *Barbara* reached Brazil in 1540, it anchored off Cabo de São Roque, along the northeastern coast of Brazil. The captain of the *Barbara* had engaged, along with the French pilot, a French interpreter, called by the Englishmen on the *Barbara* a “speechman.” The speechman and the pilot “went on land to hear news.” According to the depositions, the *Barbara* was very well received, but the crew discovered that they had landed too far from the place where brazilwood grew, and “the people said that they would not bring it so far unto us.” The crew attempted to sail, against the wind, toward the location where they might trade for brazilwood, but failed. The pilot then convinced the captain and crew to change direction and make for another landing he knew. Captain Phillips then sailed northwest. The *Barbara* landed at an unknown place where the Indians, through the speechman and pilot, “said they were glad of our coming and promised us to have of their commodities for our wares gladly.” Instead of brazilwood, however, the English crew traded for cotton, parrots, and monkeys. But the “speechman,” who was so crucial to their successful interaction with the Indians of Brazil, along with the other French crewmen, deserted. The crew of the *Barbara* soon found themselves under fire from the Indians, led by those who had deserted.¹⁶

The English had been trading intermittently along the coast of Brazil at least since the 1530s, and as the *Barbara*’s voyage demonstrates, English captains already appreciated the value of go-betweens. On one of the earlier voyages made by William Hawkins, an Indian chief accompanied Hawkins back to London and met King Henry VIII. Hawkins made three trips from Plymouth to Brazil in the 1530s, stopping first along the coast of Guinea for elephant tusks and other unspecified commodities. On the second voyage, he left behind one member of his crew, a Martin Cockeram, as surety for the safe return of the “Brazilian king” who sailed to England with Hawkins. This chief, with his lip plug and “strange” ways, made a great impression on Henry VIII and the English nobility. After a year, Hawkins shipped out for Brazil, but en route the chief died. Nevertheless, Hawkins found Cockeram, whom the Indians agreed to give up, even though the English could not deliver their chief in return.¹⁷

Virtually all the transactional go-betweens of the first generation are silent to us, for most were at best semiliterate, hence they did not write about their own

lives, their complicated identities, or their perceptions of the worlds changing around them. By midcentury, however, one group of transactional go-betweens appears frequently in the writings of several Europeans who visited Brazil. These go-betweens were the Norman interpreters, or *truchements*, who lived around Guanabara Bay and served as intermediaries in the French brazilwood trade with the Tupinambá.

In 1554, two Tupinambá brothers kidnapped Hans Staden, a German gunner who was then working at the Portuguese fortress of Bertioga at the Portuguese colony of São Vicente, and took him to their village along the coast, near the present-day town of Ubatuba. Staden later published an account of his captivity, which made him one of the most influential of the sixteenth-century representational go-betweens. Staden represented his whole experience of captivity in Brazil as a witness of his Christian faith for his European readers. More than any other text, Staden's account reinforced the view in Europe that Brazil was a land of savage and cruel cannibals. The tone of Staden's writings has led some scholars to argue that his detailed descriptions of cannibalism were exaggerated and others to contend that Staden's account may not be an authentic, original eyewitness account. Yet, one of the most striking descriptions in his tale is the portrait he draws of a transactional go-between: a Norman interpreter who had gone native in Brazil. The complexities woven into Staden's description of this Norman interpreter make it difficult to imagine that Staden could have invented his tale.¹⁸

Staden's account takes place in an Indian world bitterly divided between the Tupinikin, who lived on the Piratininga Plateau of São Vicente and who were allied with the Portuguese, and the Tupinambá, with whom the French had established alliances through their Norman interpreters. The Tupinambá lived to the north of São Vicente, along the coast around and just to the south of Guanabara Bay. Both groups shared a common language and culture.¹⁹ Two Tupinambá brothers, Jeppipo Wasu and Alkindar Miri, thinking Staden to be Portuguese, captured him one day when he was out hunting with his Guarani Indian slave in the forest. Staden tells his readers why the two brothers had taken him captive: "The Portuguese had wounded the father of the two brothers, my captors, and had shot off one of his arms so that he died of his wounds, and . . . they intended to take vengeance on me for their father's death." The two brothers then presented their captive, Staden, to their uncle, Ipperu Wasu, brother of their deceased father. Ipperu Wasu, the brothers informed Staden, "would keep me until I was

ready to be eaten, when he would kill me and thus acquire a new name.” Fearing his fate daily, Staden desperately sought an escape, but simply running away was out of the question, since the brothers, or their uncle, kept Staden under close watch and had bound his neck with a rope. Staden’s plan was to insist that he was not Portuguese, and because the Indians who held him were friendly with the French, he intended to pass himself off as a Frenchman. He hoped that a Norman interpreter or a French sailor would come to his aid, out of a common European bond and shared Christian values. He writes that when he “understood that there were Frenchmen among them who came there in their ships, I persisted in my story that I was a kinsman and friend to the French, and that they should leave me alive until the Frenchmen arrived and recognized me.”²⁰

As it happened, there were Norman interpreters living very near Ubatuba, one of whom Staden’s captors knew as Karwattuware, for a chief, Konyan Bebe, who lived in a nearby village, had adopted him as his “son.” One day Staden reports that “the savages came running to me and said: ‘Here is a Frenchman. Now we shall see whether you are in truth a Frenchman or not.’” Staden tells his readers that he rejoiced, certain that he was about to be saved by the intervention of Karwattuware, for “he was at least a Christian and would do his best for me.” But Karwattuware, who might have chosen to use his power in this situation to help Staden, did not. Instead, he spoke to him in French and “when I was unable to reply to him,” Staden writes, “he spoke to the savages in their own tongue and said: ‘Kill him and eat him, the good-for-nothing, for he is indeed a Portuguese, your enemy and mine.’” Staden did not understand French, but he clearly did understand what Karwattuware had just said in Tupi, and he recalls begging the Frenchman in Tupi, “for the love of God,” to order the Indians not to eat him. Karwattuware only replied, according to Staden, “They will certainly eat you.”²¹

Staden’s account of this meeting reveals the power of the transactional go-between, positioned in between two conflicting parties. In Staden’s eyes, Karwattuware could have saved him, but he did not. But from Karwattuware’s perspective, he had nothing to gain by saving Staden, and therefore did not wish to risk challenging the customs of the Tupinambá to free Staden. After he recovered from his shock that the Norman interpreter would not help him, Staden realized that he had no other option but to try again. He met Karwattuware some time later and again tried to use him as an intermediary with his captors. This time he had more success. Addressing the Frenchman in their common language, Tupi, Staden purportedly asked him “whether he had a Christian heart in his bosom

when he enjoined the savages to kill me, or had considered the [after]life that was to come,” which, according to Staden, caused Karwattuware to reconsider. Staden then reported that Karwattuware “began to be ashamed and excused himself, saying that he had thought that I was indeed a Portuguese, who were such scoundrels that if the French could catch them anywhere in the province of Brazil they would hang them forthwith, which was indeed the truth.” Moreover, Karwattuware explained to Staden that the French “had to submit to the savages and be content with their treatment of their enemies.”²²

After this second meeting, Staden recounts that Karwattuware did have a change of heart and promised to help him. But even Karwattuware could not do anything for Staden. Staden describes him telling his Indian friends, Staden’s captors, that Staden was a friend of France and that he would take him to a ship, but Staden’s captors would have nothing of it. Staden writes that “the savages refused to deliver me up, stating that if my own father or brother came with a shipload of axes, mirrors, knives, combs, and scissors and gave them these goods, they would not let me go.” Several months later, Karwattuware’s French ship arrived at Ubatuba. Staden first pleaded with Jacob, one of the crew members who came ashore to trade and who spoke Tupi, to take him to the ship, but that failed. Later that day he ran away and swam out to the ship. But the French sailors refused to take him on board (Fig. 3.1) because, as Staden relates it, “they thought that if they took me thus the savages would rise against them and become their enemies.”²³

Staden swam ashore “very sadly” and returned to his captivity. He continued to live with Konyan Bebe at Ubatuba and even accompanied him on an eleven-day war party against his former friends—the Tupinikin and their Portuguese allies—at Bertioga in August of 1554. A short time later, Konyan Bebe decided to give Staden away to another chief, Abbati Bossange, who lived in the environs of Guanabara Bay. Abbati Bossange adopted Staden as his son, but Staden continued to look for opportunities to escape. One came very soon, two weeks later, when another French ship arrived to trade. The men on this ship proved to be more sympathetic to Staden.

Staden designed a little drama that, with the help of the French crew, allowed him to leave Brazil. First he told his “master,” Abbati Bossange, that on the ship were his brothers, who had come to buy his freedom, but that he would remain in Brazil collecting until the ship returned the next year. When the ship was fully loaded with goods from Guanabara Bay, the captain of the crew spoke to Abbati Bossange through an interpreter and gave him several chests of trading goods.



Figure 3.1. Hans Staden begging French sailors to take him to France. Hans Staden, *Warhaftige Historia und Beschreibung einer Landschaft der wilden nacketen grimmigen Menschenfresser Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen* (Marburg, 1557). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Meanwhile, several of the crew who looked like Staden posed as his brothers and pretended to prevent Staden from remaining in Brazil. Staden promised Abbati Bossange that he would return the next year, although he had no intention of doing so. “All this was ordained so that we might part from the savages on friendly terms,” Staden writes. The *Catherine* sailed with Staden aboard on 31 October 1554, and arrived in Honfleur, Normandy, on or about 20 February 1555. But the *Maria Bellete*, which carried Karwattuware as well as the other Frenchmen who had refused to take Staden aboard, had not yet made it back to France, even though she was overdue by three months. In Staden’s eyes, the likely loss of the ship was God’s punishment for the “godless” behavior of the Frenchmen toward him in Brazil. Staden’s account of his travels, illustrated with woodcuts, appeared in Marburg, Germany, in 1557.²⁴

Staden’s depiction of Karwattuware reveals how transactional go-betweens adapted themselves to the Indian way of life and accepted the power of chiefs in order to make a commercial relationship possible between the Indian and the

European worlds. Although a European, such as Staden, initially saw such a go-between as possessing extensive power, in fact the power of the Norman interpreter was based on the successful negotiation of his place within Indian society. In such a role, Karwattuware could not go against the wishes of his Indian "father," nor was it in his interest to do so. When Staden was traded to Abbati Bossange, he, too, stepped into the role played by Karwattuware and other Norman interpreters. Just as Karwattuware did not want to alienate the chief who had adopted him as his son, Staden likewise wanted to engineer an escape for himself that would allow Abbati Bossange to save face and to remain on good terms with the French captain who carried Staden to safety.

Two French writers, whose texts, like that of Hans Staden, were avidly consumed by European audiences, also provide descriptions of Norman interpreters. A young Franciscan monk, André Thevet, remained in Brazil for three months (November 1555 through January 1556) and wrote *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557) based on his personal observations of Brazil and on his conversations with Norman interpreters. A year later, Jean de Léry, a Calvinist missionary, left France; Léry remained in Brazil for approximately one year, and after he returned to France, he, too, wrote a richly detailed account of his experience that was deeply influenced by the Norman interpreters.²⁵

Thevet provides few details on the Norman interpreters; nevertheless, it is possible to glimpse them through his writings and to understand how much he owed his portrayal of Tupinambá life to them. Some Norman interpreters served as his translators, for Thevet did not speak Tupi well enough during his ten weeks in Brazil to converse directly with Indians; other Norman interpreters provided him with information. Thevet explains in his discussion of religion that "this and many other things were affirmed for me by some Christians [i.e., Norman interpreters] who had lived there a long time." Thevet illustrates how the language ability of the Norman interpreters, as well as their lengthy residence among the Tupinambá, were essential for his own understanding of Tupinambá religion when he writes, "Here is the religion of our barbarians, which I learned by observing and understood through a truchement *français* [Norman interpreter] who had lived there six years and who understood their language perfectly."²⁶

Norman interpreters served as transactional go-betweens for Léry as he traveled around Guanabara Bay, and in their ability to translate information for Léry, they reflected their own position as go-betweens between the Tupinambá

and the French. Léry frequently notes the presence of interpreters in his narrative, giving us to understand that he was able to acquire much of his information through them. Léry provides a more complete picture of the Norman interpreters. He describes those he knew as men who had survived a shipwreck eight or nine years earlier and “had remained among the savages, where, having no fear of God, they lived in wantonness with the women and girls.” Léry visited twenty-two villages during his time in Brazil, always in the company of Norman interpreters, who moved easily from village to village. Léry notes that the interpreters were essential, for “although the Tupinambá receive very humanely the friendly strangers who go to visit them, nevertheless the Frenchmen and others from over here who do not understand their language find themselves at first marvelously disconcerted in their midst.”²⁷

Through Léry, we learn how the Norman interpreters brokered the trading relationship between the Tupinambá and the French merchants. He makes it clear that the entire French trade depended on the willingness of the coastal Tupinambá to cooperate. It was the job of the Norman interpreter to convince the coastal chiefs that it was in their interest to participate in the trade. Brazilwood was so difficult to cut, haul, and load in the absence of domestic animals such as horses or donkeys, Léry writes, that “if the foreigners who voyage over there were not helped by the savages, they could not load even a medium-sized ship in a year.” Why did the local chiefs agree to cooperate? Léry suggests that the chiefs had become accustomed to the trading goods provided by the French. Maintaining the flow of knives, hatchets, axes, scissors, and scythes required good relations with the French. This very basic desire for European goods was, for Léry, the reason why chiefs cooperated: “I will add,” he writes, “that the elders especially, who in the past lacked axes, pruning hooks, and knives—which they now find useful for cutting their wood and making their bows and arrows—not only treat visiting Frenchmen very well, but also exhort their young people to do the same in the future.”²⁸

What the French expected was extensive. Léry describes the exchange as far more favorable for the French: “In return for some frieze [woolen] garments, linen shirts, hats, knives, and other merchandise that they are given,” the Indians “cut, saw, split, quarter, and round off the brazilwood, with the hatchets, wedges, and other iron tools given to them by the French” (Fig. 3.2), then “carry it on their bare shoulders, often from a league or two [approximately 4 to 8 kilometers] away, over mountains and difficult places, clear down to the seashore



Figure 3.2. Cutting brazilwood. André F. Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique, autrement nommée Amerique* (Paris, 1558). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

by the vessels that lie at anchor, where the mariners receive it.” In Léry’s eyes, the Tupinambá did so both to receive the trading goods and to maintain their alliance with the French. The alliance with the French affected the position of the Tupinambá vis-à-vis their traditional enemies, the Tupinikin, and their new enemies, the Portuguese, and therefore it was, it seemed to Léry, in the immediate interests of the Tupinambá to protect their alliance with the French. When an elderly Indian man threatened Léry with death after Léry had killed his pet

duck, Léry reflected that despite his fear, he had not been in real danger, for “the Tupinambá knew perfectly well that, already having the Portuguese for enemies, if they had killed a Frenchman, an irreconcilable war would have been declared between them and that they would be forever deprived of our merchandise.”²⁹

To make possible this trading relationship, which carried such high stakes on both the Indian and the French sides, Norman interpreters had to establish a place for themselves within Tupinambá society. To accomplish this, they had to learn to be persuasive through discourse, they had to obtain social status, and they had to be recognized by local chiefs, for local chiefs would not cooperate unless they perceived the Norman interpreters as trustworthy and dependable, and even as their sons. Thus, to be effective as go-betweens, Norman interpreters had to become enough a part of the indigenous society to be seen as trustworthy. And to be seen as trustworthy, Norman interpreters could not challenge the fundamental structures of Tupinambá culture.

Norman interpreters could not, for example, refuse a woman, or women, given to them by chiefs, because accepting the women made them sons-in-law to the chief. This was their most important connection to Tupinambá society, for by accepting a woman, they became a son-in-law of a powerful man. Léry, a Calvinist, describes this practice as “lewd and base behavior” on the part of the Norman interpreters, but seen from the perspective of the Tupinambá, it was a recognized way of integrating adult males into their communities, and from the perspective of the Norman interpreter, it was crucial to his survival.³⁰

Similarly, because warfare was such a vital part of the indigenous world of the 1550s, Norman interpreters could not avoid the wars, and many certainly participated in them. Some of the first Europeans in Brazil described exceptionally violent wars between Indian groups,³¹ and the insertion of competing European powers (France and Portugal) only intensified intertribal warfare. Given the long tradition of war among Tupi groups, as well as the introduction of powerful new allies and enemies, European go-betweens must certainly have been valued by Indian groups because of their understanding of European arms and fighting. With a companion, Léry observed 4,000 Tupinambá and Margaia in a three-hour combat, after which the Tupinambá took thirty Margaia prisoner. Léry tells his readers that he and his French companion did not participate in the battle and that they did little more than to “hold our drawn swords in our hands, and sometimes fire a few pistol shots into the air to give courage to our side,” but nevertheless their presence was interpreted as a sign of great respect by the Tupinambá Indians. Léry then writes, “there was nothing we could have done

to give them greater pleasure than to go with them to war,” and “they continued to hold us in such high esteem that, since that time, the elders of the villages we visited always showed us the greatest affection.”³² So, too, would Norman interpreters have observed, and have given support to, the battles fought by the Tupinambá among whom they lived.

When the Tupinambá warriors returned home with their captives, the ritual cannibalism ceremony took place. An essential part of developing the trust between Norman interpreters and the Tupinambá was the formers' acceptance of the cannibalism ceremony that followed these intertribal battles. Coastal Tupi groups practiced exocannibalism, or the eating of those from outside their group, such as enemies captured in warfare.³³ Staden's account of cannibalism provides many details of the preparation leading to the ritual cannibalism ceremony. He writes that when the Tupinambá from Ubatuba returned from battle with their captives, another chief, Tatamiri, whom he described as a “king over certain huts,” took charge of the ceremonies to come. Staden relates that Tatamiri “caused drink to be prepared, according to their custom, and all the savages gathered together, drinking, singing, and making very merry.” Drinking preceded the cannibalism ceremony and was an important part of the social life of the village. Léry describes how as men danced women served them warmed drink, which they had prepared from chewing cooked manioc, boiling the masticated mass, and fermenting it in large vats. Sometimes the drinking lasted for three days, according to Léry, “until the vessels—even if there were a hundred—are all empty.” While this drink made from fermented manioc (*cauim* or *caouin* in Léry's account) lasted, the Tupinambá were “singing, whistling, egging each other on, and exhorting each other to act valiantly, and to take many prisoners when they go to war.”³⁴

Establishing and maintaining their position within indigenous society demanded that Norman interpreters not just observe but participate in this key ritual of Tupi society. Staden perceived the importance of the cannibalism rite, saying that “their greatest honor is to capture their enemies and to slay them; for such is their custom.” Léry explains that Tupinambá cannibalism is not for nourishment: “It is more out of vengeance than for the taste . . . their chief intention is that by pursuing the dead and gnawing them right down to the bone, they will strike fear and terror into the hearts of the living.” Another German, Ulrich Schmidel, who arrived in São Vicente in 1553 after having traveled overland from the small Spanish settlement of Asunción, described the Tupinikin custom of cannibalism as “a great party.” “When they defeat their enemies,”

Schmidel wrote, describing Tupi warfare, "they bring them to their village, with an accompaniment similar to our weddings."³⁵

Norman interpreters joined in the cannibalism ceremony. On one occasion early in his stay, Léry arrived at a village with a Norman interpreter, where they "found the savages dancing and finishing up the *caouin* [drink] of a prisoner whom they had killed only six hours earlier." After being greeted in the usual way, Léry recounts that his Norman interpreter, "who was not new to the customs of the savages, and who, moreover, liked to drink and *caouiner* as much as they did," left him in the house with their Tupinambá hosts and "went over to the big crowd of dancers." There the Norman interpreter remained until morning, "carousing" with the Tupinambá. Moreover, Léry, in his disapproving Calvinist voice, tells his readers: "to my great regret I am compelled to recount here that some Norman interpreters, who had lived eight or nine years in that country, accommodating themselves to the natives and leading the lives of atheists . . . surpassing the savages in inhumanity, even boasted in my hearing of having killed and eaten prisoners."³⁶

Tattooing the body of the warriors who had taken war captives was done after the slaying of the prisoner. Staden writes of the warrior who had returned with a captive that "the king of the huts scratches him in the upper part of the arm with the tooth of a wild beast." Later, after the wound had healed, "the scar remains visible, which is a great honor." Léry writes that tattooing occurred the day prisoners were killed, when their captors cut their chests, thighs, and legs and "rub these slits with certain mixtures and with a black powder that cannot ever be effaced," to signify the honor of having taken an enemy prisoner. "The more slashes they carry," Léry noted, "the more renowned they will be for having killed many prisoners, and they are consequently esteemed the more valiant by the others." The tattooing accompanied the taking of new names. According to Staden, "for every foe a man kills he takes a new name. The most famous among them is he that has the most names."³⁷

Norman interpreters could only be effective if they were enough a part of Tupinambá society to garner the trust and loyalty of Tupinambá chiefs. Léry writes that when he refused to accept the "human flesh of their prisoners," he recognized that he was not accepted by the Tupinambá, for it seemed to them that he was "not showing proper loyalty."³⁸

The accounts of Staden and Léry underscore the power of coastal Indian groups in Brazil at midcentury. Although the brazilwood trade depended on the long and hard labor of Indian men who did the work of locating, cutting, cleaning,

carrying, and stacking the brazilwood logs, and although Léry certainly thought the terms of the trade beneficial to the French, both Staden and Léry portray the coastal Tupinambá chiefs as independent, powerful, and shrewd men. Indian chiefs were in a position to demand what they wanted for the brazilwood. But although the sources reflect the authority of Tupinambá chiefs in the brazilwood trade, they nevertheless make clear that the transactional go-betweens worked generally to the benefit of Europeans. Transactional go-betweens became part of Tupi societies and deferred to their fathers-in-law and elders. Yet, while the relationships they facilitated may have served short-term interests of the tribal elders, in the long run, the brazilwood trade benefited European merchants. As the trade increased in value, the indigenous peoples of Brazil would find themselves faced with an increasing demand for logs.

The historian Alexander Marchant argues that as the brazilwood trade brought not only more frequent contact between Indians and Europeans but also increased demands for the logs, the terms of the trade clearly shifted in favor of the Indians. Brazilwood agents had to deliver more expensive and better trading goods to the Indians to maintain the brazilwood trade. Eventually, Indians became “satiated” with trading goods, at which point, he argues, “the Portuguese themselves were no longer a wondrous novelty to the Indians.”³⁹ Yet Léry and Staden both describe the intense competition between Tupinambá and Tupinikin groups, fueled by competing European rivalries. Léry perceives a dependence on the European merchandise that he suggests limits the independence of tribal elders. Similarly, Neal Salisbury argues that in the second half of the sixteenth century in North America, the expansion of the fur trade had a negative effect on Indian societies. As French merchants moved aggressively into North America, seeking to monopolize the fur trade with Algonquian Indians, they drew Indians “into a dangerous dependency on an unpredictable industry and pitted them in unequal, often destructive competition with one another.”⁴⁰

European transactional go-betweens understood in ways that their Indian fathers-in-law could not that the local brazilwood trade was intertwined with wider European rivalries. Portugal, France, England, and Spain all sought to possess some part, or all, of Brazil, either through trade or through exploration and settlement. Inevitably, the Portuguese, Spanish, and even French desire to possess more than brazilwood led to colonization.

Thirty years after Cabral’s voyage, the fear of French and Spanish claims in Brazil drove the king of Portugal to grant to Martim Afonso de Sousa the right

to plant the first official Portuguese colony in Brazil. Just as men who had gone native facilitated the brazilwood trade, so, too, did such men negotiate the needs of the first Portuguese colonists, which were far greater than those of the traders. Colonization initiated a new dimension of possession, one that brought sweeping changes to the worlds of the Tupi and Guarani peoples.

In 1530, King João III (1521–1557) sent Martim Afonso de Sousa in command of an armada that was to explore the Río de la Plata, which the Portuguese Crown contested with Spain, to attack any French merchant ships trading for brazilwood, and to create the first authorized royal settlement in Brazil. Martim Afonso de Sousa chose São Vicente, in southern Brazil, for the first colony. There was a reason for this. São Vicente was already a Portuguese settlement of sorts when Sousa arrived; in 1530, it consisted of a village of ten or twelve houses, and European stock animals (chickens and pigs) had already begun to transform the landscape. The settlement had grown for the very same reason that Sousa had chosen it: it was near the contested southern boundary of Brazil.⁴¹

The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) prompted Spain to claim southern Brazil, the Río de la Plata, and Paraguay. The treaty defined a line that separated the Spanish from the Portuguese spheres of influence. Initially, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile received from Pope Alexander VI a papal bull granting them the rights to all lands west of a line drawn through the Atlantic, 100 leagues (approximately 620 kilometers) west of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands. However, concern in Lisbon about Portuguese rights to African and Indian trade, and perhaps the certainty that a “new land” lay across the Atlantic from Africa, led King João II to insist on a separate agreement with Spain. In 1494, Ferdinand and Isabella signed a treaty with King João II in the Spanish town of Tordesillas that recognized Spain’s rights to the lands discovered by Columbus, but pushed the imaginary line “drawn north and south, from pole to pole, on the said ocean sea, from the Arctic to the Antarctic pole . . . three hundred and seventy leagues [approximately 2,300 kilometers] west of the Cabo [Cape] Verde Islands.”⁴² The Treaty of Tordesillas thereby redrew the line of demarcation, allowing Portugal eventually to claim Brazil, because it lay within the Portuguese sphere. After 1500, Spain and Portugal continually disagreed over where the line fell in Brazil: Spanish geographers invariably claimed that it bisected Brazil farther east, thus making Brazil smaller on Spanish maps.⁴³ The Portuguese cartographers, in return, claimed that Brazil extended much farther to the north and south. This can be seen in the Reinol Map of 1519 (Map 3.1), in

which the Portuguese flags that mark the northern and southern boundaries of Brazil allow Brazil to extend well south of the Río de la Plata and well beyond the mouth of the Amazon River in the north.

Spain defended its claim by sending the armadas of Juan Díaz Solís (1514–1516), Diego García (1526–1530), and Pedro de Mendoza (1535–1537). Moreover, the Spanish Crown outfitted the expeditions of the Portuguese mariners Fernão Magalhães (Magellan, 1519–1521) and García Jofre de Loaisa (1525) and of the Englishman Sebastian Cabot (1525–1530) to find a sea route to the Orient so it could gain access to the profitable spice trade that it believed lay within the Spanish sphere there. European men who had gone native in southern Brazil, in places such as São Vicente or at the nearby harbor of Cananéia, supplied these Spanish armadas with food, water, and information. South of São Vicente at Cananéia lived a *degredado* known as “the bachelor” (*o bachiller*) with his sons-in-law. According to the first references to him, in 1527 and 1530, he had been living in Brazil for thirty years.⁴⁴ Farther south, at the Island of Santa Catarina (today Florianópolis) and the Río de la Plata, also lived a few isolated men, often survivors of past disasters, who likewise served as go-betweens for the Spanish. When Sebastian Cabot arrived at the Río de la Plata in 1527, for example, his interpreters learned from their local contacts that “a Christian captive” lived among them. Francisco del Puerto was a Spaniard who had survived the massacre of Solís’ men in 1516 and lived among the Indians at Río de la Plata. Puerto then informed Cabot “about the nature of the country,” including how to navigate upstream.⁴⁵

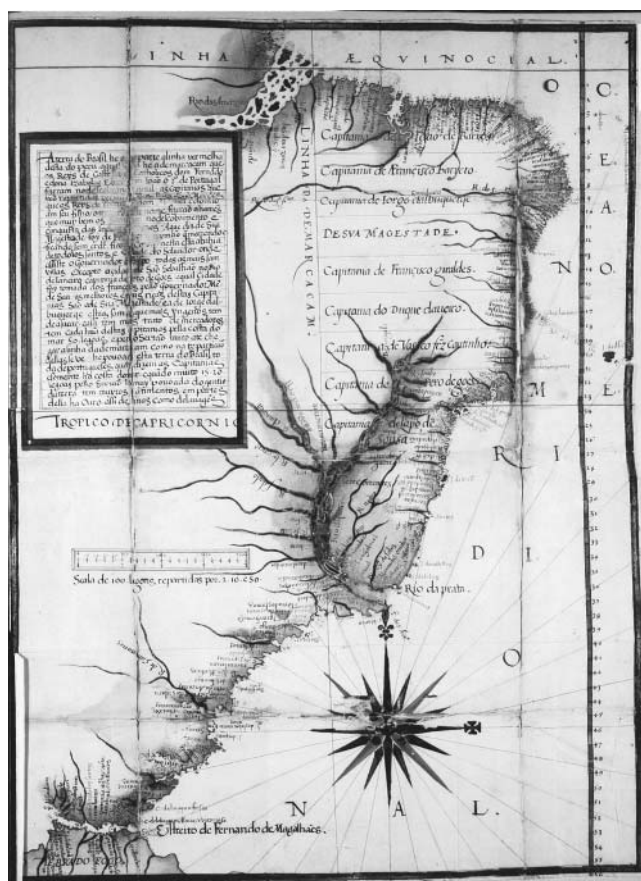
When Sousa selected São Vicente to be the site of the first chartered town in Brazil, he, with the authority invested in him by the king, created a *vila* (town), granted *sesmarias* (land grants), and established the institutions of municipal government characteristic of Portuguese society.⁴⁶ But the colony at São Vicente flourished primarily due to the presence of a Portuguese man who had lived for many years among the Indians and who served as a transactional go-between. João Ramalho had lived in Brazil since 1512. Possibly a *degredado* or a survivor of a shipwreck, Ramalho had married into the Tupinikin Indians of the Piratininga Plateau, becoming the son-in-law to the chief, Tibiriça. In São Vicente, João Ramalho brokered the relations between the Tupinikin Indians of the Piratininga Plateau and the coastal settlement founded by Martim Afonso de Sousa.

Soon after chartering the first colony at São Vicente, but before learning if and how the first colony had fared, the Portuguese Crown announced plans for

the colonization of all of Brazil.⁴⁷ This scheme granted huge strips of land, from the coast inland to the line of the Treaty of Tordesillas, to private individuals, who would colonize them at their own expense. The Crown's grandiose scheme for dividing Brazil up into hereditary grants to stimulate colonization was never a success, even though a few individual recipients of these grants, known as *donatários*, did succeed in establishing small colonial outposts along the coast of Brazil. The Crown's plan is still visible in the famous map attributed to Luís Teixeira that was drawn later in the century. Like the Reinel Map of 1519, the map shows how the Portuguese imagined its possession. Not only does all the coastline from the Amazon River to the Río de la Plata estuary fall within the line of demarcation established by the Treaty of Tordesillas, but the vast lands of Brazil, already inhabited by hundreds of Indian groups, were summarily granted to individuals through the drawing of lines. These lines, drawn parallel to the equator, bisected the coast at 50-league (approximately 300-kilometer) intervals and extended from the coast to the line of demarcation, which marked the western frontier of Brazil. Although no one knew where the line of demarcation lay in the vast interior of Brazil, the Crown nevertheless granted these broad slices of territory to "men who had well served the kings in the discovery and conquest of the Orient" (Map 3.2).⁴⁸

The Teixeira map conveys the power claimed by the Portuguese kings, a power honed as the Portuguese ships had explored the coasts of Africa, India, China, Japan, the Spice Islands, and Brazil, using their advances in navigation, mapmaking, and shipbuilding. But the mere fact of having things that conferred power in Europe—such as the accumulated knowledge recorded on the map, the rights assigned in the king's donation, the titles granted to administer justice and to distribute land, or the resources of a personal fortune—did not ensure that those favored with such grants could actually possess them. It was only through the intervention of transactional go-betweens, some named but most not, that the successful *donatários* were able, over many years, to possess a small part of Brazil.

Of the fifteen hereditary grants given by the king, ten were settled in the sixteenth century, and of these, only two, São Vicente and Pernambuco, were successful. The recipients of the grants generally intended to develop a new economic focus in Brazil, and because the Crown monopolized the brazilwood trade, that new focus was sugar. Following the successful production and export of sugar on the Portuguese Atlantic island of Madeira in the fifteenth century, Spanish colonists on the Canary Islands and Portuguese colonists in São Tomé hoped to develop sugar economies in the early sixteenth century. By the 1530s,



Map 3.2. A map of Brazil, c. 1580. [Luís Teixeira], *Roteiro de todos os sinais, conhecimentos, fundos, baixos, alturas, e derrotas que há na costa do Brasil desde o cabo de Santo Agostinho até ao estreito de Fernão de Magalhães*. Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon.

signs pointed to success in the Canaries, and especially in São Tomé, thus making sugar a logical crop to try in Brazil. But, whereas transactional go-betweens in the brazilwood trade could establish terms of trade that, at least in the short term, were generally seen as favorable to both Indians and Europeans, sugar cultivation was another matter. The cultivation, cutting, and milling of cane and the boiling and dripping of cane syrup to produce sugar required extensive labor that, unlike the labor of the brazilwood trade, could not easily be fit into the extant lifestyle of coastal Tupi indigenous groups, where women were the primary agriculturalists. On the Atlantic islands off the coast of Africa, sugar

cultivation had rested on the backs of slaves, imported from other Atlantic islands or from Africa. Those who intended to introduce sugar into Brazil certainly would have planned to use slaves to meet their labor needs there, too. Moreover, sugar cultivation would encroach on lands and forests already claimed by Indian groups. Sugar, therefore, represented a far greater series of demands from Europeans, and Indians were in a position to refuse.⁴⁹

But before sugar plantations could be contemplated, the first colonies had to establish a rudimentary infrastructure. Historian John Monteiro observes that the most successful colonies “were precisely those where significant alliances had been struck between European adventurers and native headmen.” Such alliances had been “cemented by marriage strategies, as headmen ‘adopted’ outsiders as sons-in-law.”⁵⁰ These outsider sons-in-law served as transactional go-betweens when colonization began.

The agency of Ramalho at the Portuguese colony in São Vicente is clearly visible. By 1548, the captaincy of São Vicente had six hundred colonists, three thousand slaves, and six sugar mills. These slaves were Indians from traditional enemies of the Tupinikin, supplied by Ramalho, who lived on the Piratininga Plateau, above the coastal settlement. Monteiro argues that having such a powerful broker undoubtedly favored the vulnerable coastal settlement, for “Ramalho clearly had appropriated the attributes of a Tupinikin headman.”⁵¹

Other go-betweens, including *mamelucos*, also helped the colony. When Hans Staden found himself in São Vicente a few years later, some of his closest companions in the settlement were five *mameluco* brothers. Staden had signed on for a Spanish expedition to the Río de la Plata led by Diego de Sanabria, who had been appointed by the king of Spain as governor of Paraguay. Leaving Spain in 1549, two of the three ships arrived at the Island of Santa Catarina, the agreed-upon meeting place, but the third never arrived and was presumed lost. Because one of the ships was no longer seaworthy, most of the men set out overland for Asunción, while part of the remaining men, including Staden, sailed for São Vicente. The Portuguese colonists there depended on their alliance with the Tupinikin, but at the frontier between Tupinikin and Tupinambá territory, they relied on the five *mameluco* brothers, who became Staden’s friends. These men, the sons of Diego de Praga and an Indian woman, Staden writes, “were experienced both in Christian and savage speech and customs.” They protected the passage between the Island of Santo Amaro and the mainland, and they had begun to build a fort, known as Bertioaga, where Staden found work as a gunner.⁵²

Later, after Staden had been captured, his Tupinambá captors led a war party against the Portuguese in São Vicente. Staden describes how they overtook five canoes in which were two of the Praga brothers, who held off the war party of thirty canoes for two hours with a gun and bows and arrows, but were then overtaken when their arrows ran out. Staden describes the cannibalization of several of their companions, including a cousin. The two brothers were captives but still alive when Staden was traded to another group. Staden believed that they had escaped, although he did not know if they were later recaptured.⁵³

At the Bay of All Saints, the Portuguese colony got off to a rocky start, even with the presence of an influential transactional go-between named Diogo Álvares, known as “Caramuru” (Eel) by the Indians living around the Bay of All Saints. Pero Lopes de Sousa, who chronicled his brother Martim Afonso de Sousa’s expedition to Brazil, met Álvares in 1531 and wrote in his log that “at this bay [of All Saints] we found a Portuguese who had been here twenty-two years,” and he “gave a long notice of what was in this land.” Álvares had married the daughter of a local chief in the region around the Bay of All Saints, thereby becoming linked through kinship to many Indians. Before the hereditary grant to colonize the region at the northernmost part of the Bay of All Saints was given to Francisco Pereira Coutinho, Álvares was already active as a transactional go-between, supplying ships with information and most likely food and possibly brazilwood.⁵⁴

When Francisco Pereira Coutinho, the donatário of Bahia, arrived at the Bay of All Saints in 1536 with colonists, Álvares became his ally. In return for facilitating relations with local Indians, Coutinho gave Álvares and his son-in-law land grants in 1536. For nine years, Álvares’ brokerage with the Indians was successful, for Coutinho was able to develop cotton and sugar cultivation as well as a small settlement known as Vila Velha (Old Town). But this was to end in 1545. According to the donatários of neighboring Porto Seguro and Pernambuco, Coutinho was a poor leader and in ill health. Dissatisfaction among his colonists led to a rebellion against his authority. Moreover, the Indians attacked Vila Velha, causing the survivors to flee and the donatário to take refuge in Porto Seguro. The donatário of Porto Seguro learned from Álvares, who had traveled to Porto Seguro from the Bay of All Saints to deliver the news, that a French ship had anchored there, and its crew had taken possession of all remaining artillery in the abandoned settlement and had made friends with the Indians. The information supplied by Álvares suggested that

the French had promised to return with four or five armed ships and with French colonists who would claim the remains of the settlement and rebuild the abandoned cotton and sugar plantations. Coutinho resolved to return to defend his grant, but on the way back, the ship sank off the coast of the island of Itaparica, and Francisco Pereira Coutinho, the donatário of Bahia, became a prisoner of the Tupinambá, who killed and cannibalized him. Álvares escaped, according to a sixteenth-century chronicler, because of his “good language.” The Indian attack, the threat of the French takeover, and the death of the donatário at the hands of the Tupinambá all seemed to doom the colony at Vila Velha.⁵⁵

Duarte Coelho received the captaincy of Pernambuco, the site of one of the king’s brazilwood feitorias. The success of his colony may have depended in part on his brother-in-law, Jerônimo de Albuquerque. Coelho embarked for Pernambuco accompanied by his Portuguese wife, Beatriz de Albuquerque, and other family members, including Jerônimo. Jerônimo established a long-standing liaison with an Indian woman who was the daughter of the local chief, Arcoverde. Presumably, Coelho was able to build on existing relationships with the Indians living in the region, as well as new ones, such as that of his brother-in-law with the Indians.⁵⁶

Coelho’s grant lay in a prime region for trading brazilwood, but as brazilwood was a royal monopoly and could only be harvested with permission from the king, Coelho and his colonists intended to build a sugar economy. Before leaving Portugal, Coelho had negotiated with investors for the sugar mills, and soon after he arrived, he ordered the construction of these mills. By 1542 he reported that a substantial amount of cane had been planted and that “a very large and perfect” sugar mill was almost completed, with others to be started. In 1550, five sugar mills were grinding cane, and others then under construction would mill in the future, if the king were to respect the rights and privileges initially granted by Coelho to the sugar mill owners.⁵⁷

Coelho’s letters to the king indicate that he dealt carefully with the neighboring Indians and that he resented the competing demands for Indian labor posed by the brazilwood trade. The brazilwood trade had become so onerous that the Indians did not do the “hard” and “dangerous” work willingly unless they were paid well. As a result, Coelho wrote to the king, “since they are glutted with tools . . . they stir themselves up and make themselves proud, and rebel.” The Indians who had formerly brought Coelho and his colonists food to exchange for tools, and who had done the hard work of clearing and building the mills,

now no longer wished to work, for they had enough tools and no longer wished to trade their labor for them. Relations with Indians deteriorated as *degradados* continued to arrive in Coelho's captaincy as colonists. Coelho had little use for the *degradados*; he complained to the king that they committed "much evil and damage" and because of them, Coelho wrote, "we have lost the trust which we have had until now with the Indians."⁵⁸

The roles of transactional go-betweens in the other captaincies where settlements began—Porto Seguro, Espírito Santo, Ilhéus, and Paraíba do Sul—are shrouded in uncertainty. A reference to the role of interpreters, who were certainly present in all the initial settlements, appears in a letter from Pero de Góis, the *donatário* of Paraíba do Sul, to the king. Góis worked hard to build sugar mills, attract settlers, import slaves, and recruit skilled workmen in order to be able to export sugar. He saw that good relations with the local Indians were essential. He hired an interpreter to work with his overseer and two other men with the Indians. Their job was to persuade Indians to clear land and to plant cane and foodstuffs. The interpreter received a higher salary than the overseer. After leaving the settlement, known as Rainha, for a while, Góis returned from Portugal only to find that in his absence the people he had left behind had fled, leaving his captaincy "wasted" and "in rebellion." He established a second settlement farther inland, where the colonists planted sugarcane and Góis worked to build a mill. The work was for naught, however, as relations with the neighboring Indians broke down after a Portuguese man from another captaincy enslaved a powerful chief. The chief's people attacked one of Góis' villages, killing men, burning the canefields, and taking the artillery. A few years later, Góis abandoned Paraíba do Sul and returned to Portugal.⁵⁹

Pero do Campo Tourinho received the grant that encompassed the shore where Cabral landed in 1500, known as Porto Seguro. A native of Viana do Castelo, Tourinho spent eleven years building his captaincy. In 1545, the *donatário* of Bahia took refuge with him after the colonists of Bahia had rebelled against him and the Indians had attacked his settlement. Tourinho wrote the king in 1546 describing the dangers in Brazil, especially those posed by the attack of the Indians and the designs of the French. Three months later, in November 1546, Tourinho found himself at odds with his own colonists, a group of whom took him prisoner and sent him to Lisbon in chains to be tried by the Inquisition. Those who imprisoned him accused him of blasphemy against the church. The ensuing trial by the Inquisition reveals a conflict between Tourinho's desire to

work his slaves and servants hard, even on Sundays and holy days, to build the colony, and the proper deference that sixteenth-century Portuguese, even in the colonies, were required to show toward clergy and traditional Catholic beliefs. Tourinho never returned to Brazil.⁶⁰

When the Portuguese Crown recognized the failures in its private colonization initiative, it decided to send its own royal governor and to build its own capital in Brazil. King João III first reclaimed the captaincy of Bahia from the heirs of the first donatário, the deceased and cannibalized Francisco Pereira Coutinho, and then prepared to build a capital city to house a central government for Brazil. The new royal governor, Tomé de Sousa, possessed a *regimento*, or a series of instructions from King João III, that ordered him to proceed directly to the Bay of All Saints in command of an armada of six ships and 1,000 men, 320 of whom were soldiers. The armada arrived in the Bay of All Saints in March 1549, after eight weeks at sea. On arrival, the king instructed Sousa to peacefully disembark the men of his armada. The king had reason to believe that Sousa would find some Portuguese colonists living in the remains of the small walled settlement of Vila Velha, begun by the former donatário of Bahia, Francisco Pereira Coutinho. By virtue of his *regimento*, Sousa had the authority “to make war against any who resisted him.”⁶¹

But the king and Sousa hoped that war would be unnecessary. To ensure Sousa's initial success, the king had written ahead to Diogo Álvares, making him aware of the armada that would arrive in Bahia and the plans for building a new capital. Recognizing Álvares' “great knowledge and experience” of the land, the peoples, and their customs, the king ordered him to approach Tomé de Sousa as soon as his armada arrived and to help him in every way. King João III explained that he wrote “because I am informed that through the great experience and knowledge that you have of these lands, and of their peoples and customs . . . as soon as the said Tomé de Souza arrives there, I order you to go to him, and help him . . . because in doing this you will do great service.”⁶²

When Sousa landed, the forty to fifty Portuguese colonists living in Vila Velha “happily” welcomed him. With no need to prepare for war, Tomé de Sousa turned to the second part of the king's directives. With the help of Álvares and his son-in-law, Sousa reconnoitered the Bay of All Saints, seeking a “healthful place with good airs,” well watered, and near an anchorage that would become the capital of Brazil. Of the six hundred colonists who accompanied him, the majority were *degradados* sent as forced colonists to Brazil. Care

had been taken to enlist carpenters, blacksmiths, sawyers, and stonemasons who would oversee the construction of the capital, and work on it soon began. The tiny city was given the full name of Nossa Senhora do Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos (Our Lady of the Savior of the Bay of All Saints), which was subsequently known as the City of Salvador, and the surrounding region as Bahia.⁶³

Tomé de Sousa also carried instructions to visit the other Portuguese colonies in Brazil. When he visited São Vicente, he recognized the importance of João Ramalho. Tomé de Sousa wrote the king in 1553 that he ordered a town founded above the coastal settlement, on the plain of Piratininga, so that those who were living scattered on the plain would be united in one walled settlement, and over this settlement he placed João Ramalho as captain. A German soldier who passed through Ramalho's town in 1553 commented on the great power of Ramalho, who could call up five thousand Indian warriors on a day's notice.⁶⁴

At midcentury, the French also tried their hand at colonization. In 1555, under the leadership of Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, the French proposed to establish a colony in the Bay of Guanabara (present-day Rio de Janeiro) that would, in addition to protecting French interests in the brazilwood trade, harbor French Protestants. Accompanying Villegagnon was the Franciscan André Thevet; a year later, three ships left France for the French colony, carrying three hundred soldiers, sailors, and missionaries, among whom was Jean de Léry, the Calvinist missionary.⁶⁵

Villegagnon depended on the Norman interpreters for the survival of his colony. But early on he made the mistake of alienating them. The Norman interpreters revolted against Villegagnon a few months after his arrival in Brazil, in February 1556. Rashly, Villegagnon had decreed that no Frenchman might live with an Indian woman, including the Norman interpreters, unless they were properly married. One Norman interpreter who had lived with his Indian woman for seven years decided to turn on Villegagnon. In the words of Villegagnon's pilot, Nicholas Barré, the truchement lived "without God, Faith, or Law" and did not wish to leave his "whore" or his "superior life" to live in the company of Christians. The Norman interpreter recruited thirty artisans and laborers in Villegagnon's company who had come to Brazil hoping to become rich, but instead found themselves worked very hard building a fort and given very little food. The Norman interpreter promised them "great liberty" and "riches" and the freedom to "live as they wished" if they would rise up against Villegagnon.⁶⁶

A plot to blow up the powder in the fort's cellar failed, as did the attempt to slit Villegagnon's throat, and the ringleaders were clapped into irons. The Norman interpreter who started the rebellion was not there to be captured, probably because, as might be expected, he was safe among his Tupinambá family. He then turned the Norman interpreters living in Tupinambá villages on the mainland against Villegagnon. Barré writes that he "has corrupted all the other interpreters of the said land, who are in number twenty or twenty-five; these do and say all the bad that they can to surprise us and make us return to France."⁶⁷ Villegagnon had challenged one of the sources of power wielded by the Norman interpreters, and in return, the Norman interpreters refused to continue as his transactional go-betweens with the surrounding Tupinambá villages. Villegagnon returned to France in 1559; the next year, the Portuguese would attack the colony and expel the surviving French.

The men who played the roles of transactional go-betweens during the first generation relied on Indian women who are almost totally silent in the historical sources. Yet their presence, and their roles as go-betweens in their own right, can be read between the lines. A few of these Indian women are named. One was Paraguaçu, the Indian wife of Diogo Álvares. Álvares had liaisons with various Indian women, but he was married to Paraguaçu, whom he took to France and who was baptized in Brittany in 1528. A baptismal record for "Catherine du Brazil," recorded in St. Malo in 1528, is considered to be that of Álvares' wife, known as Catarina Paraguaçu. Catarina Paraguaçu returned to Brazil with Álvares, where she was part of the transaction of the relationship between her husband and her father and between her husband and her larger kin group. When Tomé de Sousa arrived, along with the first Jesuits to set foot in Brazil, Álvares sent his wife and daughters to the Jesuit school, where they were instructed in the Christian faith.⁶⁸

In São Vicente, Ramalho also had liaisons with several women, but he had a long-lasting alliance with one woman, Bartira, later baptized as Isabel. Bartira, like Paraguaçu, was the daughter of a chief: Tibiriça of Piratininga. Ramalho never married Bartira, even after the arrival of Catholic clergy, as he had been married in Portugal and his wife was still alive there. In Pernambuco, Jerônimo de Albuquerque's liaison with the Indian woman who was the daughter of the local chief is another example of the same pattern. According to legend, on one occasion she intervened and saved the life of Jerônimo. Baptized with the name Maria do Espírito Santo, she never became Albuquerque's wife.



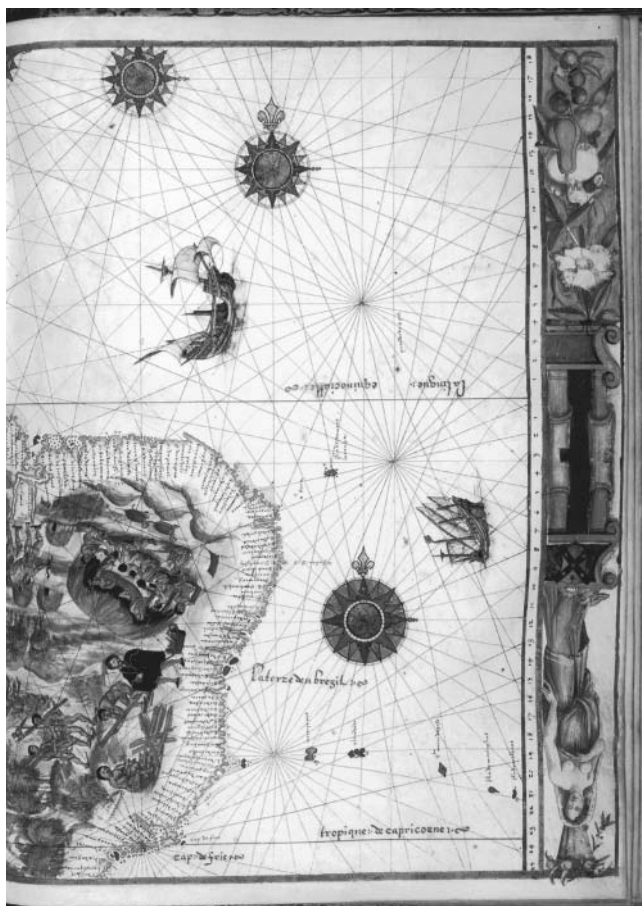
Figure 3.3. Transactional go-betweens. Vallard Atlas, 1547. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Through these Indian women, all three men attained the status and power of an Indian chief, expressed especially in their large clan of descendants. Tomé de Sousa dared not even estimate the size of João Ramalho's family. His descendants, both by Bartira and by other women, formed the basis of his powerful clan in São Vicente.⁶⁹ The daughters of these men became highly desirable marriage partners for Portuguese men who arrived in Brazil. Of Diogo Álvares' sixteen known children, twelve were women, and all twelve women married Europeans, some of whom became prominent men in the colony. Three of Álvares' sons were later knighted by the king.⁷⁰ Jerônimo de Albuquerque's liaison with Maria do Espírito Santo, as well as with other Indian women, similarly resulted in the births of many *mameluco* children; he had at least twenty. Before marrying a Portuguese woman at the request of the queen of Portugal, Albuquerque legitimated his *mameluco* children. These *mameluco* children married Portuguese colonists and founded many prominent families in Pernambuco.⁷¹

The strategies of the first generation of transactional go-betweens proved crucial as Europeans sought to possess Brazil. Although the Reinell Map does not include them in the depiction of Brazil, two maps drawn several decades later, in the style of the Dieppe School in France, do. The maps appear in an atlas dated 1547 that was owned or drawn by a Nicholas Vallard, of Dieppe. The maps are

clearly derived from Portuguese knowledge, for place-names along the coast, not only of Brazil but of other regions, appear in Portuguese, but the nautical tables and other cartographic terms, such as the equator, are written in French. Who might have drawn the fascinating interior landscapes is not known, but they were clearly influenced by firsthand information. In the map of southern South America, European men positioned to the north of the Río de la Plata negotiate with Indian men and women (Fig. 3.3).

A second map in the atlas depicts the coast of northern South America from the Caribbean to the Tropic of Capricorn, and places the Tropic of Capricorn



Map 3.3. Northern South America (inverted), 1547. Vallard Atlas, 1547. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

at the top of the map and the Caribbean at the bottom. Inland from the Brazilian coast, just above the Bay of All Saints, appears the single man dressed in black who was illustrated in the first chapter as an example of a go-between in sixteenth-century Brazil (see Fig. 1.3). Seen in the context of the whole map, it is clear that the miniaturist recognized his importance. Not only does he interact with the men collecting brazilwood, but he is positioned next to a domestic scene—a shelter with a hammock and fires and several Indians relaxing—which suggests his contact with Indian villages, where he most certainly met chiefs and women (Map 3.3).

The vignettes painted over Brazil in the Vallard Atlas visually illustrate that the possession of Brazil required go-betweens, such as men who crossed the ocean, negotiators and traders, and men who allied themselves with native women in the villages. The first colonies demanded much more, however, from the coastal Indian villages than had the brazilwood trade, and thus the transactional go-betweens who arbitrated for the European side became even more important. The justification for the colonization of Brazil, as articulated by the king of Portugal, was not simple possession but evangelization. It quickly became apparent that it was not enough for the Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples to supply brazilwood, food, and labor for the Portuguese. They were now expected to accept and to practice Christianity. Converting the indigenous peoples of Brazil to Christianity would require a new sort of transactional go-between: the missionary. Missionary priests of a newly founded religious order, the Society of Jesus, would soon fill this role.

4. *Conversion*

We are beginning to visit their villages . . . and to converse intimately with them . . .

Manoel da Nóbrega, Bahia, 1549

In 1549, a new and very different kind of go-between appeared on the scene in Brazil: the missionary priests and brothers of the Society of Jesus.¹ At first glance, the Jesuits hardly seem to resemble the go-betweens of the Portuguese maritime world, most of whom rarely chose their role; rather, as survivors of shipwrecks or as *degradados*, they found themselves with the stark choice of adapting or dying. The bachelor of Cananéia, João Ramalho, or Diogo Álvares “Caramuru” had begun as simple physical go-betweens but had parlayed their social position and linguistic ability into effective new roles for themselves as transactional go-betweens. Such men seem very different from the intense men of the first generation of the Society of Jesus. Jesuits came to Brazil not to adapt to Indian society as a means to survive, but rather to create the means for the spiritual salvation of the Indians. But the Jesuits clearly perceived the power of the role of translation and mediation. They sought to convert through persuasion, which made language and example essential to their mission. In Europe, a prominent historian of the Jesuits writes, “Their ministries were characterized by discourse”; so, too, would their ministries in Brazil be defined.² Jesuits deliberately sought to become the mediators between Indians and God, because they saw in that role the means to effect the salvation of the Indians of Brazil. Later, Jesuits would become self-conscious representational go-betweens, using their correspondence with powerful men in Europe to influence European perceptions of Brazil. Through their religious dramas, sermons, and schools, they sought to shape the behavior of Indians and colonists in Brazil. In all three

roles—physical, transactional, and representational—Jesuits were some of the most powerful go-betweens of the sixteenth century.

The first Jesuits arrived in Brazil in 1549 with the newly appointed royal governor, Tomé de Sousa. The six Jesuits who disembarked with Tomé de Sousa were among the earliest members of a new religious order unlike any other. Jesuits did not live in monasteries, nor did they participate in the communal chanting of the liturgical hours (matins, lauds, vespers) characteristic of the medieval monastic orders. Rather, they dedicated themselves to ministry in the world, and to those peoples who had no one to minister to them. In Europe, these included prostitutes, the sick, the poor, heretics, and outcasts in general. The first Jesuits were indefatigable preachers, holding forth in villages, in streets, in public squares, on ships, in hospitals, and “wherever men and women gather,” in the words of the Society’s secretary.³

The Jesuits sailed with Tomé de Sousa because King João III of Portugal ardently supported the new order. King João took as his confessor the Jesuit Simão Rodrigues, who lived at court, tutored the king’s son, and served as the head of the Portuguese assistancy of the Society, founded in 1546. King João offered the new order the possibility for overseas missions in the vast new areas that Portuguese exploration had opened up in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Historian John O’Malley observes that “the initiative for the Jesuits’ most spectacular ‘missions’ during these early years—to India, Brazil, Ethiopia—came not from the reigning pope but from King John [João III] of Portugal.” The sixteenth-century Jesuits who left Portugal to bring Christianity to the king’s overseas colonies, men such as Francis Xavier or Manoel da Nóbrega, in O’Malley’s words, “fulfilled the evangelizing aspirations of the first companions, and they set a powerful example for the generations to come.”⁴

On arrival in Brazil, the Jesuit fathers and brothers with Tomé de Sousa undoubtedly were an integral part of the Portuguese Catholic culture that the king intended to foment in Brazil. Two days after their arrival, on Sunday, the Jesuits performed this role by celebrating their first mass in Brazil. Nóbrega preached to the governor and his party, while the Basque Jesuit, Juan de Azpilcueta Navarro, who became known in Brazil as João de Azpilcueta, preached to the colonists living in the settlement, Vila Velha. Yet the Society was so new, and overseas missions such uncharted territory, that the institutions for which the Jesuits would later become known, such as schools, did not yet exist. The Jesuits, therefore, experimented freely in these first years, seeking to define their mission to Brazil.

The great lack of morality encountered in the Portuguese settlement surprised the first Jesuits: "The people here all live in mortal sin," Nóbrega wrote in his first letter from Brazil, "and there is not one man who desists from having many Indian women, all of whom have many children. None of them have come to confess yet." Although Nóbrega saw that there was much spiritual work to be done among the Portuguese colonists, the Jesuits had not come to Brazil to minister to them. In his official instructions (regimento) given to Tomé de Sousa, King João states that the "principal reason that moved me to order the settlement of Brazil was so that the people [i.e., Indians] of that land would be converted to our holy Catholic faith." Immediately, Nóbrega outlined the role that the Jesuits would play in Brazil, and it required that they leave the Portuguese settlement and seek the Indians. In his first letter he writes, "We have resolved to go and live in the villages when we are more settled, to learn with them the language and to teach them little by little." Moreover, the Jesuits would move beyond the new capital to be built, Salvador, and would disperse themselves along the coast of Brazil. Soon after arriving in Brazil, the Jesuits began to leave Bahia. Nóbrega sent Jesuits Leonardo Nunes and Diogo Jacome to Ilhéus in August 1549; Nóbrega himself left Salvador in November and visited first Ilhéus, then Porto Seguro. Leonardo Nunes continued from Ilhéus to São Vicente with ten or twelve children to begin a mission there. In 1551, Nóbrega was in Pernambuco with Antônio Pires. By August of 1551, Afonso Brás had established the Jesuit mission in Espírito Santo.⁵ These resolutions to go and live among the Indians and to establish missions near all the Portuguese settlements in Brazil laid the foundation for the roles that the Jesuits would play as go-betweens.

Initially, however, Jesuits lacked even the most fundamental requirements of go-betweens: familiarity with language and culture. In India as in Brazil, the first Jesuits had to rely on interpreters, which brought a whole set of new problems. In India, the Jesuits mistrusted the accuracy of the prayers translated by interpreters, and they disliked the fact that good interpreters were not only hard to find but difficult to keep.⁶ In Brazil, Nóbrega expressed his frustration at the language barrier when he could not easily translate prayers and devotions into the indigenous language. "They are so primitive (*brutos*)," he complained, "that they don't have the words." Later, in a formal report, he tempered his criticism, saying, "They have very few words through which we can declare our faith." This required compromise and adaptation; as Nóbrega explained, "Some things we must explain by roundabout means."⁷ Recognizing the problem and their own deficiencies, the Jesuits first tried to work through go-betweens who were

already established in Brazil, such as Diogo Álvares "Caramuru." Nóbrega hoped to enlist the aid of Álvares to translate prayers, but he was already quite busy as the transactional go-between for the governor.

The Jesuits set about, therefore, to learn Tupi themselves. In this they followed strategies similar to those used by the early Jesuit missionaries to India, who reported great success when they could evangelize in the languages of the peoples they hoped to convert. In Brazil, João de Azpilcueta seemed to have the greatest facility. According to Nóbrega, although the rest of the Jesuits were coarse and poorly trained in the language, Azpilcueta soon was able to walk from Indian village to Indian village making himself understood, and even to preach in Tupi. A year after their arrival, Azpilcueta described a church that had been finished near the Indian villages; there he said mass and taught in the Indian language. He had succeeded in articulating the creation of the world, the commandments, the articles of faith, and prayers in the Indian language. Still, Azpilcueta was not completely self-sufficient; one year later, in 1551, he describes traveling with an interpreter.⁸

While the first Jesuits were learning languages, they, in the interim, took advantage of those outside the order who spoke Tupi and Portuguese. In Porto Seguro, Azpilcueta worked with a man who could write Tupi. Azpilcueta preached sermons from the Old and New Testaments and recited various doctrines of the church so that the man could write them down in Tupi. By 1553, these were finished, and a copy was ready to be sent to Portugal. Azpilcueta entrusted to two Jesuit companions the texts that he had in the "language of Brazil," which included "all the prayers . . . the commandments and mortal sins . . . a general confession, the beginning of the world, the incarnation, the judgment, and the end of the world."⁹

The Society greatly benefited when men, moved by the example of the first Jesuits, decided that they themselves had vocations. A few very skilled interpreters joined the Society. One of the best interpreters in São Vicente was a Jesuit novice, Pero Correia. Correia had been in Brazil since 1534 and had formerly made his living as a broker between the Indians and the Portuguese, not unlike the positions of Ramalho or Caramuru. He claimed to have negotiated a peace with the Indians of Bahia, who had rebelled against the first donatário, Francisco Pereira Coutinho, and maintained that the Indians there "made me lord of their land." He had been a slave trader along the coast of Brazil, raiding Indian villages and selling Indian men and women into slavery, but in 1549, he repented

and entered the Society of Jesus, quickly becoming their best interpreter. In São Vicente in 1553 he preached every Sunday afternoon in the “language of the land,” where many free and enslaved Indians came to hear him. On Fridays, the Jesuits held a conversation, which the fathers gave in Portuguese to the Portuguese-speaking community, while Brother Correia gave another in the Indian language. Nóbrega instantly recognized the value of Correia to the order. He “does more than any of us, because of the language,” Nóbrega wrote. Another brother who served as an interpreter in São Vicente described his work: “There, I preached in the language of the Indians that which the father told me, and all the slaves and whites who heard it were moved and edified.”¹⁰

Ideally, Jesuits hoped to convert chiefs to use their example to facilitate the conversion of their families, villages, and regions. In his first letter from Brazil, Nóbrega described meeting an Indian chief who was already baptized a Christian and who, because of his baptism, was looked down upon by his family and kin. Describing him as “very fervent” and “a great friend of ours,” Nóbrega took the time to cultivate him, giving him a cap left over from the sea voyage and a pair of trousers. In return, the chief brought the Jesuits fish and other comestibles. The Jesuits taught him early in the morning, because although he had been baptized, “he does not yet have knowledge of our faith.” According to Nóbrega, the chief promised that he would make his brothers, his wife, and as many as he could Christians. Encouraged by his example, Nóbrega hoped to make him into “a great means and example to all the others.”¹¹

Similarly, on missions into the Indian villages outside the Portuguese settlements, the Jesuits paid special attention to chiefs. On arriving at a village, they found the chief, usually lying in a hammock, and received and gave the traditional greetings in Tupi:

Chief: “Ereiube” (“Vengáis en hora buena”) [You arrive at a good time; it is well].

Visitor: “Paa” (“Sí”) [Yes].¹²

Although the Jesuits recognized that chiefs were their means of entry into the Indian society, more often than not they found it easier to work through their children. The Jesuits received any children sent to them, but they especially wanted to educate the children of chiefs. On a mission into the Recôncavo, the region surrounding the Bay of All Saints, one of the Jesuit missionaries wrote that the chief Grillo gave them a beautiful boy to educate. Through their teaching of children, Jesuits fully intended to break the bonds between children and

parents. They consciously saw themselves performing the same role as Jesus, as stated in the gospel of Matthew 10:35: "For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Jesuits reported with satisfaction times when children prevented their parents from drinking, or when they preferred not to see their kin, or when they did not want to show "filial love" to their visiting parents.¹³

The first Jesuits began to teach children immediately. Sometime during the first weeks they were in Brazil, four Jesuits traveled to the Indian villages that surrounded Vila Velha and the new capital city that was being built and invited the Indian boys to study reading and writing, which the Indians greatly admired and wanted to learn. Soon, Indian boys wearing lip plugs came daily to Brother Vicente Rodrigues and Father João de Azpilcueta to learn to read and write Portuguese; those lessons also included memorizing prayers. The boys quickly began to conform to the Jesuit ways. Nóbrega writes that their lip plugs caused problems with their pronunciation, and Azpilcueta "made them understand the impediment." Then one of the boys' mothers came and removed his plug and threw it away, and the others followed suit. As a by-product of teaching reading and writing in Portuguese, the Jesuits imparted essential Christian doctrine. This seemed to work so well that Nóbrega, excited by the possibilities, proclaimed in a letter that through knowledge, which the devil had used to defeat humankind, the devil himself would be defeated.¹⁴

The receptivity of Indian boys to their teaching caused the Jesuits to consider using Portuguese children as a way to draw in even more children. The Jesuit house in Lisbon raised orphans; seven of these children came to Brazil in 1550. A Portuguese Jesuit praised this strategy in a letter sent to the founder of the Society, Ignatius de Loyola, in Rome: "I have letters [from Brazil] of the great good that they [the seven orphans] are doing there. When one of these children goes forth, more than two hundred Indian children come to him, embrace him, and laugh with him, and have great fun." The children from Portugal taught Christian doctrines to Indian children, who in turn taught others in the village. By teaching the Indian children in the villages, the Portuguese child missionaries learned the Indian language as well. Three years after arriving in Brazil, Nóbrega summed up the Jesuit strategy of working through Indian children: "We intend to raise Indian children because they are many and we are few and we know how to speak poorly in their language." By the time that Nóbrega penned these words, the Indian children assisted with sermons and singing, in

both Portuguese and Tupi. They served as translators in confession for Indians, slaves, the newly converted, and even the wife and children of Diogo Álvares “Caramuru,” who did not speak Portuguese. By 1552, the Society of Jesus had raised and educated approximately two hundred orphans, who, they claimed, received an education equal to what was given in Portugal. Thus did children become transactional go-betweens for the Jesuits.¹⁵

Jesuits recognized that *mamelucos*, children as well as adults, would also make excellent interpreters. In early sixteenth-century Brazil, Portuguese settlers and traders used the word “*mameluco*” to describe the children of Portuguese men and Indian women. The term, which came from the Arabic *mamluk*, “to be possessed,” suggested slavery, military service, and “white” slave.¹⁶ It is difficult to know how much of this history the Portuguese saw in the newly emerging social and ethnic group in Brazil or why they chose this name for the children of mixed race. Many *mamelucos* certainly were the sons of Indian women who were servants and slaves. Despite their proximity to slavery, the Portuguese in Brazil commonly considered *mamelucos* to be “white,” which may reflect the early meaning of “*mameluk*” as a Caucasian slave. Many adult *mameluco* men did make their livings from service as warriors, although they were never slaves.

The first generation of *mamelucos* lived in the Portuguese settlements as well as in the Indian villages. When the first Jesuits arrived in Brazil, they commented on the *mamelucos* living as Indians. Leonardo Nunes wrote from São Vicente that he wanted to send a very tall and very cheerful *mameluco* back to Portugal so that his Jesuit companions could see for themselves “what there is here.” The youth had lived naked for ten years among the Indians; he spoke no Portuguese; he knew nothing of Christianity. In Pernambuco, Nóbrega found “many children of Christians lost in the wilderness among the Indians,” both boys and girls, whom he wanted to return to Christian virtues.¹⁷

Jesuits sought to educate *mamelucos* as interpreters, and even as potential novices for their order, to press their language ability into the service of evangelism. Nóbrega worked with one youth in Pernambuco whom he described as “lost” because he “ate human flesh as the Indians”; Nóbrega planned to send this youth out into the wilderness to persuade the other *mameluco* children to return to Christianity.¹⁸

Mameluco children attended Jesuit schools along with Indians; in many ways the groups were indistinguishable. Both Indian and *mameluco* children sang in Latin at mass and sang in Tupi on missions to the Indian villages. As time passed,

the Jesuits saw the mameluco children, though born into “the most dissolute people of this land,” as holding the future of Brazil in their hands. The influence of the mameluco children, the Jesuit José de Anchieta suggested, would play a great part in the “edification or the destruction of the land.” Therefore, he recommended that Jesuits take as many pains to educate mameluco children as they took with Indian children. He recognized, too, that their language skills would make them invaluable interpreters who could help the Jesuits in the conversion of the Indians. Some, he thought, might even find vocations in the Society of Jesus.¹⁹

Nóbrega seriously considered recruiting mamelucos into the Society. He wrote to the head of the Jesuit order in Rome that “it has always seemed to me that they, Indians as well as mestizos, would be very useful workers, because of the language and because they are themselves natives of this land.” But, for this to work, he believed that the candidates must be sent to Europe to be educated in “letters and virtues.” In 1555, he had two mamelucos prepared for Coimbra, the site of Portugal’s university. In 1561, Nóbrega proposed two more mamelucos, who, pending final approval from Rome, would travel to Evora, another city noted for its learning in Portugal. Not all of Nóbrega’s colleagues agreed with him. Nóbrega’s successor, Luís da Grã, doubted that mamelucos were what the Jesuits needed. The mamelucos “do not have talent,” he remarked, and those whom the Jesuits had received into the Society “had not lived up to expectations.”²⁰

Jesuits doubted the trustworthiness of mamelucos within their society for the same reason that they were drawn to mamelucos. Because of the mamelucos’ ease within the Indian world, they could help the Jesuit missionaries change that world. But, on the other hand, that same ease with which mamelucos fit into the Indian world might be used against the mission of the Jesuits. Anchieta confirmed these fears in a letter from São Vicente in 1555. Deep in the interior, mamelucos had destroyed a mission begun by two fathers and had “corrupted, with the venom of words and the example of bad life, those whom we had already subjected to the yoke of Christ.”²¹

Despite these reservations, some mamelucos did enter the Society of Jesus and became “tongues” in service to God. By 1574, 110 men served in the Society of Jesus in Brazil; the majority (65%) hailed from Portugal, and the second-largest group (14%) was Brazilian born—usually, but not always, of Portuguese parents. Among this 14 percent numbered the mamelucos who had joined the Society in Brazil, and most of these were known within the Society as *línguas*,

or “interpreters.” But the gradual entry of *mamelucos* into the Society during the first two decades was later reversed during Everard Mercurian’s term as father general of the Society of Jesus. In 1574 Mercurian wrote to the Jesuit provincial (head of the Society) of Brazil stating that the sons of Portuguese men and women in Brazil might be admitted into the Society if they had shown extensive proof of their virtue, constancy, and desire to leave the world and to live a religious vocation. Although the ability to speak the Indian language was valuable, Mercurian cautioned that it should not be given too much weight. The sons of Indians were not to be considered at all for admission. A few years later, the tide had turned even against the Brazilian-born sons of Portuguese colonists. At the same time that Mercurian barred Asians and Eurasians from joining the order in Asia, he also barred those born in Brazil. “The experience of many years has shown,” he wrote to the provincial of Brazil, “that they are not fit for our Institute.”²²

The first Jesuits consciously worked with Indian and *mameluca* women, who became some of their most ardent early converts. When the Jesuits arrived in Brazil, they found that the vast majority of the women living in the Portuguese settlements all along the coast were Indian and *mameluca* women. Many of these women were baptized Christians, living as the concubines of Portuguese men. Because the Jesuits disapproved of the way Portuguese men in Brazil lived with many women, in “the custom of this land,” they focused their initial preaching to the Portuguese colony on the sinfulness of such a state. The Jesuits urged the men to marry one woman. By introducing changes in the accepted social mores, the Jesuits inadvertently created a new group of potential go-betweens: Christian *mamelucas* and Christian Indian women who were no longer part of the households of Portuguese men.

The attention paid by the Jesuits to the sins of Portuguese men had an impact on Indian and *mameluca* women, who formerly had little choice but to accept their state as free or enslaved concubines. With the arrival of the Jesuits, however, new opportunities opened up for these women, and many became vocal Christians and strong supporters of the Jesuits. In Bahia, the Jesuits taught women as well as children; ten months after arriving in Brazil, Nóbrega wrote that the “children and women already know how to pray well.” Christian Indian and *mameluca* women came to the Jesuits to be taught about Christianity, some even risking beatings from their husbands. In Pernambuco at least forty women had been brought from the Indian villages to be baptized by Portuguese priests

and kept as concubines. Many of these came on their knees to the Jesuit house, asking “for the love of God” to be further taught. These women brought their children to be educated as well. Nóbrega encouraged the women to formalize their unions in marriage, and he hoped to use some of these women to preach in their home villages in the interior. A recently converted Indian woman preached with such fervor one night in the streets of São Vicente that she unsettled many men and women of the town. Such women were like “mirrors,” a Jesuit wrote, “not only for their kinfolk, but for the women of Portugal, too.”²³

Indian and mameluca women soon became interpreters for the Jesuits. In Pernambuco, the interpreter for the sermons and doctrines taught by Antônio Pires to the Indian and African slaves was an honorable married woman, who also served as interpreter when Father Pires confessed Christian Indian women. “I believe that she is the best confessor that I have because she is so virtuous,” Pires wrote.²⁴

The essential message brought by the Jesuits was that Indians must be persuaded to convert to Christianity in order to enjoy eternal life. In the early letters from Brazil, Jesuits constantly describe how they talked, presented arguments, preached, taught through dialogues, and recited prayers to the Indians. A Jesuit in Lisbon, who met with Tomé de Sousa on his return to Portugal in 1554, wrote to Rome that Sousa described Nóbrega’s method in Brazil as follows: Nóbrega surveyed an area, ascertained those “who lived in evil ways,” and divided them among Jesuits who then visited them daily. In these visits, Jesuits exhorted the men and women to give up sin and to confess, “and if they had not persuaded them, they returned to the beginning to speak to them again, and so they importuned them until they converted to our Lord.” In Brazil, Antônio Pires summed up the approach in a sketch of an exchange with an Indian, wherein he [Pires] convinced the Indian through his arguments: “What is lacking here,” Pires wrote, “is a continual conversation” that would put the Indians on the road to heaven.²⁵

José de Anchieta, who arrived in Brazil as a young brother in 1553, provided many of the tools that would make this conversation possible. First a teacher in the Jesuit school in Piratininga, Anchieta quickly learned Tupi-Guarani, the *língua da terra* (the language of the land), and wrote a grammar and dictionary that were used by Jesuits throughout the regions where what the Jesuits called the *língua geral* (universal language) was understood. Anchieta’s grammar, which was used to teach Jesuits the *língua geral*, was followed by other manuals, such as a catechism, a dialogue of faith, and a manual to aid in the confessional.²⁶

To Jesuits such as Anchieta fell the task of translating Christian concepts of heaven and hell, God, the devil, the resurrection, and other ideas into words that Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples could understand. Such translations appropriated elements of Indian culture and gave them new meanings. “Tupã” was the word Anchieta used to translate “God”; in Tupi cosmology, Tupã created thunder and lightning from the sky. Anchieta used “Añánga,” which among Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples referred to dangerous spirits of the forests, to represent “the devil.” He retained Jesus and Santa Maria, but defined Jesus as “Jandé Jára” (Our Lord) and Mary as “Tupãsy” (Mother of God).²⁷

Jesuits developed persuasive arguments to kindle a desire among Indians to convert to Christianity. Leonardo Nunes wrote that the Indians “greatly fear death and the day of judgment and hell,” and that this led many to convert so as to be saved. Nunes ordered his interpreter, the skilled Brother Pero Correia, “always to touch on this in the conversations, because the fear puts them in great confusion.” Another theme stressed by Vicente Rodrigues through his child interpreters was that “the time of dreams had passed” and that it was time for Indians to “wake up and hear the word of God, our Lord.” Pero Correia promised Indians that “if they believed in God, not only would our Lord give them great things in heaven . . . but that in this world on their lands he would give them many things that were hidden.”²⁸

Similarly, on the other side of the world, a Jesuit in Hormuz described the debates that he held weekly with learned Muslims, Jews, and mystics. Mondays, he debated with mystics (*iogues*) and others he calls gentiles (*gentios*). Fridays, he debated a Muslim philosopher, and Saturdays, he went to the synagogue. One of the debates with a Jew drew a large audience, which the Jesuit preacher saw as particularly beneficial for the Christians.²⁹

But language sometimes was not enough, and Jesuits had to work on their form. As Jesuits changed the traditional means of delivering Christianity—that is, the rituals familiar to the faithful in Portugal, Spain, France, or Italy—they instinctively built on the tried and true ways of go-betweens. Translating Christianity required more than the simple exchange of one set of words for another; Jesuit missionaries had to present Christianity in ways that appealed to the Indians of Brazil. One Jesuit believed of the Indians that “because they love musical things, we, by playing and singing among them, will win them.” Azpilcueta adapted the Pater Noster (Lord’s Prayer) to “their way of singing” so that the Indian boys would learn it faster and enjoy it more. The Portuguese orphans went from village to village “singing and playing in the way of the

Indians and with their very same sounds and songs, moving the words in praise of God.” They shook rattles (*maracás*) and beat thick canes on the ground and sang at night, in the Indian style. Nóbrega even disclosed that the “songs of Our Lord” the Jesuits sang in Indian tones and to the accompaniment of Indian instruments came from “their celebrations when they kill enemies and when they walk around drunk.” But to Nóbrega it was perfectly justifiable because it attracted Indians. In the Jesuit mind, if Indians gave up certain customs, such as cannibalistic ceremonies, they might retain other customs, such as their music, if turned toward different, spiritual ends.³⁰

Similarly, when the Jesuits recognized that the Indians had developed effective ways of persuading through preaching, they imitated the Indian style. They used the Indian intonations, preached while walking around, and even beat their chests for emphasis.³¹

Using their newly developed techniques and their go-betweens, Jesuit missions set out from Portuguese settlements to Indian villages. In São Vicente, where Leonardo Nunes had begun the Jesuit mission, his interpreter, Brother Pero Correia, described a mission into the interior in 1553. Six brothers and Father Nunes traveled the Tietê River by canoe for eight or nine days, then walked overland. At every village, Nunes ordered Correia to preach for two hours at dawn “because that was the time that the chiefs and shamans customarily preached.”³²

A letter from Bahia vividly describes the early missions to Indian villages outside the new capital of Salvador. These missions were led by one of the Jesuit fathers, accompanied by the children whom the Jesuits had been educating. The procession left the settlement with a cross, decorated with brilliant feathers, held high. A baby Jesus in an angelic pose held a small sword in his hand at the top of the cross, while below, the children walked two by two or three by three, preaching in loud voices in the Indian language something resembling the following:

Christ is the true God who made the heavens and the earth and all of the things for us, so that we would know and serve him. We, whom He made of earth, and to whom He gave everything, do not wish to believe in him or to know him. We obey instead witchdoctors and evil ways. But from here forward there is no excuse, because God has sent the true holiness, which is the cross and these words and songs. God has life for those who believe, there, where He is, in heaven.³³

Such missions went from Indian village to Indian village, singing in the Indian style and playing Indian instruments, using, a Jesuit reflected, “their own sounds and songs, with the words changed to praise God.” When the group arrived at the villages, the Jesuit priest addressed the Indian chiefs, admonishing them to become Christians and to prepare for the arrival of the *pajé guaçu*, or “Great Chief.” This was the bishop, newly appointed to the city of Salvador. But the Jesuit counseled them not to become Christians as their forebears had done: in exchange for a shirt, for which they had been punished with death. Rather, the Jesuit priest exhorted them to become Christians for the love of God and promised them that if they believed in the true holiness and did the things of God that they were taught, they would receive life everlasting in the heavens while the evil ones who died would go to hell to burn with the devil.³⁴

Using their facility with language and their willingness to incorporate indigenous ways of persuasion, the Jesuits quickly moved to seize the ground they desired: to be the intermediaries between Indians and God. Their agency would make it possible for Indians to meet the true intermediary: the Messiah, as in the words of Timothy, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Timothy 2:5).

The Jesuits could not simply step into this role of spiritual intermediary, however, because that role was already taken by Indian shamans. Five months after arriving in Brazil, Nóbrega described how he sought to break the power of a shaman through reason and persuasion. Nóbrega described the shaman as “the greatest witchdoctor [*hechizero*] of the land”; their encounter took place in an Indian village. Quoting from scripture, Nóbrega reportedly asked the shaman “by what authority are you doing these things,” and whether he had communication with God and the devil. To Nóbrega’s horror, the shaman replied that he was God, and that he was born God, and that the God of the heavens was his friend and appeared to him in clouds, thunder, and lightning. Nóbrega immediately called together the whole village, and for a long time, through his interpreter, contradicted all that the shaman had said. Nóbrega describes his interpreter as saying all that he said in a loud voice with the same signs of great sentiment that Nóbrega himself had expressed. The effect of all this, according to Nóbrega, was that it confused the shaman, who retracted all that he had said, beseeched Nóbrega to ask God for his pardon, and requested baptism.³⁵

Through preaching, debating, teaching, admonishing, and praying, the first Jesuits immediately began to have an effect on the cultural and religious

landscape of coastal Brazil and the inland Piratininga Plateau of São Vicente. Through their multiple intermediaries, they made an impression on Indians, *mamelucos*, and Portuguese alike. The Jesuits initially reported positive, even glowing, results among Indians. Antônio Pires wrote that “the Indians at first did not believe us, and it seemed to them that we lied to them and deceived them . . . as had the lay ministers of Satan, who in the beginning came to this land and preached to them in the interest of their abominable slave trade.” But, he continued, now that the Indians were learning the truth, and recognizing the love that the fathers had for them and the trouble they went to in seeking the salvation of their souls, “they understand and want to be Christians with much greater desire and with much greater purpose than at first.” Similarly, Jesuits wrote of great gains made among the Portuguese men, who had been accustomed to live publicly with many women. Leonardo Nunes counted up the number of men who had married their concubines (fifteen or sixteen, with seven or eight ready to marry) and noted that other men with wives in Portugal had ceased living with their concubines in Brazil and that several single men left Indian and slave concubines to marry the daughters of Portuguese men who had arrived on the fleet with Tomé de Sousa.³⁶

The first Jesuits saw concrete results from their mission among the Indians. Nóbrega believed that through their preaching, the fame of the Jesuits had spread through the Indian villages, such that Indians came from very great distances to hear the Jesuits. “We tell them,” Nóbrega wrote, “that on their account principally we came to this land and not for the whites.” This clearly had resonated with the Indians, Nóbrega reflected, because the Indians showed great willingness for the Jesuits to talk to them and to teach them. With enough missionaries, Nóbrega thought that it would be easy to convert them all. Other Jesuits similarly depicted early successes in the evangelization of Indians. “The Christians who remain with us,” Antônio Pires wrote, “are so much ours that they fight with their brothers to defend us.”³⁷

Although the first Jesuits seemed pleased with their early successes among the Indians, criticism from an unexpected source upset them. This criticism came from the first bishop named to Brazil, Pedro Fernandes Sardinha. The bishop found fault precisely with the Jesuit strategy of becoming and using go-betweens. In his very first sermon, the bishop spoke out against the adoption of Indian customs by “white men.” He particularly objected to the indigenous customs that the Jesuits had adapted in their evangelization mission. In a confidential letter he wrote to Simão Rodrigues, principal of the Jesuit Portuguese

province, he questioned the way that the orphans, whom the Jesuits raised in Bahia, sang “in the Indian tone” and played the instruments “that these barbarous [Indians] play” in their drunken and cannibalistic ceremonies. Such music was so dissonant and against reason that the bishop did not know “what ears could tolerate such sounds and such coarse playing.” It was even worse, the bishop continued, that the Jesuit priest Salvador Rodrigues “played, danced, and leaped about with them.” In the bishop’s opinion, this went too far in favor of the Indian customs and had little benefit for their conversion. He also found it odd that the children cut their hair in the Indian way, and he raised concerns about the way Jesuits were burying baptized Indians. These criticisms sparked an angry exchange between the bishop and Nóbrega, in which the bishop indignantly informed Nóbrega, “I did not come here to make Christians Indians, but to accustom Indians to being Christians!”³⁸

The bishop objected especially to interpreters in confession. Nóbrega’s use of *mameluca* women as interpreters caused rumors to spread, the bishop wrote, because “it is something so new and never used in the church.” If an interpreter must be used, the bishop opined, the interpreter must be an “approved honest man,” not “a ten-year-old child”; moreover, the interpreter must be selected by the penitent, not by the confessor. Henceforth, he forbade Nóbrega from using women and *mameluco* children as intermediaries in confession.³⁹

Nóbrega struggled with his anger. In his letter to Simão Rodrigues, he defended the position of the Jesuits in Brazil. He thought the cutting of hair “not very different from our custom” and justified the use of Indian music and instruments as something that “attracted the hearts of Indians.” He supported the children who translated confessions, arguing that they had been carefully raised by the Jesuits, and that they aided in the confessions of slaves, newly converted Indians, and *mamelucos* who spoke no Portuguese, all of whom who would not otherwise have any spiritual care. “It is a very beneficial thing and of great importance in this land,” Nóbrega wrote, “because there are not many priests who know the [Indian] language.” Besides, to ban the use of interpreters would mean that the grace of the sacrament would be taken from those who did not speak Portuguese. He rejected the bishop’s view that interpreters were never used in the church and asked his superior to send theological opinions on the subject to Brazil.⁴⁰

With the arrival of the bishop, the Jesuit mission began to falter in Bahia. Within a year, Nóbrega decided to leave Bahia and to concentrate on the Jesuit mission in São Vicente. Nóbrega cited the lack of good interpreters and the

unleashing of “such cruel” intertribal wars, in addition to conflicts with the bishop, as reasons why the Jesuits could no longer make headway with the Indians of Bahia. He wrote the king that the bishop “wishes to follow a different style than our way of doing things,” adding diplomatically and with self-deprecation that “his must be the better way, because he is very virtuous, zealous, educated, and experienced.” Leaving Bahia to the bishop, Nóbrega sailed south to São Vicente, a place he believed better suited to the Jesuit mission. There, he had excellent interpreters. The Indians of Piratininga lived under one chief, Tibiriçá, who was a baptized Christian. Perhaps most important to Nóbrega’s thinking, São Vicente lay at the entrance to the *sertão*, or “wilderness,” where Nóbrega hoped to launch many missionaries among the Guarani peoples.⁴¹

Leonardo Nunes had led the mission to São Vicente, which almost never arrived, due to the absence of an interpreter. About 10 or 12 leagues (approximately 60 to 74 kilometers) from São Vicente, the ship carrying Nunes spotted seven canoes, each with thirty or forty paddlers, the Indians painted with black or with other colors and covered with feathers. Fearing them, the ship’s crew changed course and headed out to sea. As Nunes told the story, the Indians gave pursuit, paddling so hard that they overtook the sailing ship and demanded to know who they were. “And because we did not have an interpreter who knew how to respond,” Nunes wrote, “they took us for Frenchmen” and immediately attacked. As the arrows fell on them like rain, Nunes retreated to a corner of the ship, fell to his knees, and prayed for help from God. Eventually, the Indians realized that they were Portuguese and let them continue on to São Vicente. There, Nunes found three “Portuguese” towns in the region of São Vicente, in each of which the inhabitants lived “in very grave sin,” not only because they were living outside of marriage, but because they had not confessed for thirty or forty years. Above, on the plateau, Nunes visited the Indian village, known as Piratininga, where he found some white men. These were João Ramalho and his mameluco sons. The Jesuit residence in São Vicente quickly became the largest in Brazil, with fourteen brothers, many of whom were excellent interpreters. Nunes hoped to use the interpreters for missions into the wilderness once more Jesuit priests arrived from Portugal. He planned to dispatch two brothers with each priest, and in this way begin the evangelization of the Indians of São Vicente and the wilderness beyond.⁴²

Nóbrega’s arrival in 1553 was as dramatic, if not more so, as Leonardo Nunes’ had been three years before. Nóbrega traveled from Bahia to São Vicente in an armada led by the governor, Tomé de Sousa, who was visiting all the Portuguese

settlements in Brazil. The armada included *desterrados* (banished persons, i.e., *degradados*), who were to be distributed in settlements beyond Bahia. Among the *degradados* on Nóbrega's ship were women, whom Nóbrega ordered to sleep covered and in locked chambers at night. The voyage took place in the late summer. It was very hot, and Nóbrega had come down with a fever and had to be bled along the way. When the ships arrived in São Vicente, Leonardo Nunes came out in a small boat to meet Nóbrega, still weak from his fever, to take him ashore. But a storm blew up, the boat capsized, and Nóbrega did not know how to swim. Somehow, the Indians with Nunes managed to get Nóbrega ashore to a nearby island.⁴³

When he had recovered, Nóbrega found the mission thriving in São Vicente. The church, built by Leonardo Nunes, Nóbrega characterized as better than any other in Brazil, and the Jesuit house had fifty children in the school and frequently supported up to one hundred persons. Nóbrega now saw the early work of the Society in Bahia as having been a training ground for their true mission, which would be in the wilderness, in the lands of the Guarani, where few Christians had been before. The Jesuits whom the Society sends to Brazil, he argued to his superior in Lisbon, should come to São Vicente, "because in the other captaincies I believe now that they will do little more than teach children." Nóbrega was impressed with the interpreters in São Vicente, especially with Pero Correia, whom he named "the best interpreter in Brazil." Nóbrega was eager not to lose time and to use the "authority" and "respect" that Correia enjoyed among the Indians to begin the real mission of Jesuits in Brazil. Nóbrega wrote to Luís Gonçalves da Camara in Lisbon that they had determined it to be God's will that they go 100 leagues (approximately 600 kilometers) into the wilderness and build a house where they would gather the children of the Indians, teaching and joining together many Indians in "a great city" where they would live "in conformity with reason."⁴⁴

But the governor, Tomé de Sousa, was uncomfortable with the Jesuits living deep in the wilderness, practically in Spanish territory. He wrote the king in June of 1553, shortly after the armada brought him and Nóbrega to São Vicente, that "the Jesuits have great desire to go into the wilderness and to establish houses among the Indian, and I forbade it." The governor would allow two or three Jesuits to go into the wilderness with their interpreters to preach to the Indians, but he thought erecting residences so distant from the Portuguese settlement would be too dangerous. The governor also feared that the entrance of the Jesuits into the wilderness would draw with them many evildoers and debtors from São

Vicente, attracted by the reports of gold and silver in the mountains. He therefore closed the overland road, or trail, that ran from São Vicente to Asunción in the Spanish zone of influence in Paraguay. One year later, the king himself decreed that the Jesuits might not enter the wilderness without the permission of the governor of Brazil. In spite of this setback, the Jesuits continued to organize short missionary expeditions into the wilderness and did in fact establish a residence 50 leagues (approximately 300 kilometers) from São Vicente, where the two priests and brothers taught Indian children. Nóbrega continued to dream about a mission to Paraguay.⁴⁵

The Jesuit mission in São Vicente soon conflicted with João Ramalho, who already served as an established go-between, mediating Indian and Portuguese interaction. After Jesuit Leonardo Nunes arrived in São Vicente, Nunes decided to found the shrine of Santo André on the Piratininga Plateau when Ramalho and his mameluco descendants refused to move to the Christian settlements of the coast. Ramalho and his sons, in Nunes' view, "lived a life of savages." Later, Tomé de Sousa would reinforce Nunes' actions by choosing the chapel as the site of the town to be called Santo André. This was the seat of Ramalho's influence, and the chapel would have been built with his consent and support. Father Nunes visited the chapel from time to time, but on the third visit, he had an altercation with Ramalho. The problem for Father Nunes was that Ramalho, who had left a wife behind in Portugal many years before, had been excommunicated by a local priest for the mortal sin of fornication. While Father Nunes was celebrating mass inside the chapel, Ramalho entered, and Nunes ordered him to leave, saying that he could not celebrate mass in his presence. Ramalho stepped outside and two of his sons followed him out, with the intention, according to the Jesuit writing about the event, of striking Nunes when mass had ended.⁴⁶

When Nóbrega arrived in São Vicente, he immediately heard much about Ramalho, whom he described as the "oldest European resident here." Whereas he saw Álvares as the means through which he would be able to communicate with the Indians in Bahia, he saw Ramalho as a "rock against which we stumble" because "[h]is lifestyle, and that of his children, is Indian." Because Ramalho had such an extensive network of kin, he held great influence. Before he had met Ramalho, Nóbrega wrote of him in 1553:

He and his sons have many women, and they sleep with sisters [of these women] and they have many children with them, both the father and the

sons. His sons go to war with the Indians and go to their festivals, and they live naked, as do the Indians.⁴⁷

When Nóbrega met Ramalho two months later, he moderated his account, apparently deciding to try to win Ramalho over to use him to reach the Indians. Nóbrega took the oldest of Ramalho's sons on a mission into the wilderness so as to "give our ministry more authority" among the Indians because he is "well known and venerated." Moreover, at the same time that the governor of Brazil judged Ramalho's descendants too numerous even to estimate, Nóbrega stated in a letter that all of Ramalho's sons and daughters came from one Indian woman, the daughter of a chief. "We hope that in him and in her and in their children to have a great means for the conversion of the Indians," he wrote.⁴⁸

Ramalho's primary Indian wife is identified by genealogists as Bartira, daughter of the chief of Piratininga, Tibiriçá, and baptized as Isabel Dias. The year that Nóbrega arrived, Ramalho's "woman" had an encounter with the bailiffs of the secular clergy. This unnamed woman may well be the woman whom genealogists name as Isabel Dias. According to Pero Correia, when the Jesuits preached against the sin of living with women outside of marriage, they promised those who did not mend their ways that punishment would come from the hand of the secular clergy. The bishop sent his agent through Brazil to mete out punishments, but Correia was deeply disappointed by what happened in São Vicente. He cites the case of Ramalho's woman as an example. The bishop's agent assessed Ramalho a fine of one slave for living with an Indian woman outside of marriage. Correia writes that Ramalho's woman objected, because the slave taken was a woman "whom she cared for" and who had helped her to raise several of her children. Ramalho's woman planned to complain to Governor Tomé de Sousa. But, Correia noted, someone told her that she should be quiet, for by letting the slave be taken, she could be assured of never being separated from Ramalho. For Correia, the lesson learned by the errant colonists from this and similar actions of the bishop's agent was that sins could be paid for: "The law of the Church did not come to this land to separate them from sin and to heal their souls, but to take their properties from them," he wrote in one of his letters.⁴⁹

Nóbrega very much wanted Ramalho's marital status to be resolved. He asked that it be verified immediately in Vouzela, in the diocese of Viseu (in northern Portugal), whether Ramalho's wife of forty years ago was still alive. "If this man were in a state of grace," he wrote, "Our Lord would do much through

him.” Assuming that Ramalho’s wife had died, Nóbrega also wanted a dispensation so that Ramalho could marry his Indian woman, even though he had had carnal knowledge of her sister and other kin. Presumably, Nóbrega had worked out a deal with Ramalho, for he added that money was not a problem: Ramalho was prepared to send payment in sugar for the expenses of obtaining the documents.⁵⁰

The Jesuits established their own base, 2 leagues (approximately 12 kilometers) from Ramalho’s town of Santo André, on the site that would become the future city of São Paulo. Nóbrega wrote to the king, two months after he had met Ramalho, and expressed satisfaction with the small and attractive settlement that was forming around the church. But one year later, José de Anchieta revealed that the relationship between the Jesuit settlement and Ramalho’s town had deteriorated. The *mamelucos*, Anchieta wrote, “never cease from striving, along with their father [Ramalho], to cast out from the land the work which, with the help of God, we are trying to build.” Ramalho’s sons openly defied the Jesuits’ evangelism and even exhorted those Indians to whom the Jesuits were directing their mission “to leave us and to believe in them, who use bows and arrows like the Indians, and not to trust in us who were sent here for our own evil purposes.”⁵¹

Ramalho’s sons did not seem ready to exchange the power they derived from Indian society for the salvation preached by the Jesuits. Anchieta, horrified, wrote about the open acceptance of cannibalism by Ramalho’s sons. He described how one of Ramalho’s sons killed a war captive “with greatest cruelty,” colored his legs red, and took the name of the one he had killed as a sign of honor. Anchieta would not go so far as to accuse Ramalho’s son of cannibalism, but in his mind, the point was moot: “and if he did not eat of the war captive, he at least gave him to the Indians to eat, exhorting them not to let be lost he whom he had killed, but to cook him and take him to eat.”⁵²

Very early on, Anchieta perceived the threat posed by the *mameluco* sons of Ramalho to the Jesuits. In essence, they were competitors who might use their language ability and knowledge of the Portuguese world to work for the Indian world rather than for the European one. Anchieta claimed that he feared less their threats, “even to death,” than he did their cultural influence. Far worse than death threats, in his view, was the way they undercut the Jesuit teaching of Indians. “If this pernicious plague is not extinguished,” he predicted, “not only will the conversion of the infidels not progress, but it will debilitate itself and it will diminish more and more.”⁵³

The Jesuits understood that the character of their mission brought many dangers. The first martyr of the Society, Antonio Crimali, was killed in India in 1549. In 1554, Pero Correia became the first Jesuit martyr in Brazil. On a mission south of São Vicente, he died, with his companion, from wounds received from Guarani bowmen. Nóbrega, intent on expanding the Jesuit mission among the Guarani, whom he saw as the Jesuits' best hope for evangelism in Brazil, had sent Correia with two brothers to preach to villages of Indians along the coast and to open a door for a future mission to the Ibiraiara Indians. While on their mission among the Guarani, Correia and João de Sousa learned that the Guarani had two Europeans living with them who acted as their interpreters. One was a Spaniard who had lived for many years among them, "adapting their customs but exceeding them in corruption," Anchieta writes in a letter describing Correia's death, and the other was a Portuguese. The Spaniard "had great authority among them," Anchieta reports, and urged the Indians to attack Correia and Sousa because they were opening up a road that would be used by their enemies to make war against them. As Correia and Sousa were making their way back to São Vicente, the Guarani Indians, incited by the Spaniard, shot them both to death with arrows. A seventeenth-century Jesuit martyrology portrays the men dying, one with his body pierced with arrows, the other dying from a blow delivered by a war club (Fig. 4.1).⁵⁴

The Jesuits had complex reactions to these deaths. On the one hand, they were greatly saddened by the loss of their best interpreter and by the treachery exhibited by the Guarani. But, on the other hand, in ways that are difficult for modern readers to understand, they saw the deaths not as tragic, but rather as "glorious" and worthy of emulation. "These blessed brothers suffered death in holy obedience, in the preaching of the gospel, in peace, and for the love and charity of their neighbors," José de Anchieta wrote to Loyola, and "all of us wish mightily and ask God through constant prayer that we might die in this way." The chief of Piratininga, Tibiriçá, Anchieta reported, expressed his feelings in the Indian way. From midnight to dawn, he walked the house repeating many times: "The prince of the true speech, the only one who tells us the truth, the one who loved us with sincere love from the heart, has died."⁵⁵

Tibiriçá characterized Correia as a "prince of speech," and Anchieta, Nóbrega, and Loyola recognized him as the "best interpreter" in Brazil.⁵⁶ Through his great facility with language, Correia connected very different and often hostile worlds. He was fluent in indigenous languages and cultures, which allowed him to translate Christianity into concepts and rituals that could be understood.



Figure 4.1. The martyrdom of Pero Correia and João de Sousa, 1554. Mathias Tanner, *Societatis Jesu. Americana*. Prague: Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandae, 1675. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Through his powerful preaching, which he modeled on the great chiefs of indigenous society as well as on Jesuit traditions of preaching in Europe, Correia achieved the first objective of the Jesuits in Brazil: to bring Christianity to the Indians through persuasion, not force.

After Correia's death, however, a tone of discouragement sets into many of the Jesuit letters as the fathers and brothers of the Society of Jesus recognized that the conversion of the Indians of Brazil would not be as easy as they had first thought. Several more prominent Jesuits died, among them Leonardo

Nunes, the founder of the mission in São Vicente, who drowned at sea when his ship wrecked en route from Brazil in 1554; and João de Azpilcueta, gifted in languages and preaching, died from a fever he contracted in 1557. Moreover, the first bishop of Salvador, with whom Nóbrega had tangled earlier, was called back to Lisbon and died when his ship sank off the northeastern coast of Brazil. Bishop Sardinha's death was particularly traumatic, as he, along with most of those on the ship, was cannibalized by Caeté Indians. Nóbrega's own health began to deteriorate, and many thought that his end was near.

Nóbrega returned to Salvador following the death of Sardinha and found the new governor of Brazil, Mem de Sá (1557–1572), prepared to force the Indians living around Salvador into submission. A combination of his deteriorating health and setbacks in the Jesuit mission in Bahia led Nóbrega and other Jesuits in Bahia to see the governor's planned use of force as a step forward in the conversion of Indians. Nóbrega had already articulated the need to congregate Indians into villages, where they would live under Portuguese law as well as under the control of the church. This would be beneficial, he believed, for the evangelism of the Indians, and it would protect them from the unscrupulous colonists, who continually sought Indian labor. But in May of 1558, a disillusioned Nóbrega recommended defeating the Indians militarily to achieve this goal. He expressed anger that the Portuguese, who came from a nation feared and obeyed around the world, were nevertheless suffering in Brazil and were accommodating themselves to the ways of Indians—"the most vile and sad people of the world." Were the Indians to be subjugated, Nóbrega believed that many of the problems faced by the Jesuits would cease. The conflict between the Jesuits and Portuguese colonists over Indian slavery would be resolved, because subjugating the Indians would require the declaration of "just wars," the defeated parties of which could legally be enslaved. Many more sugar mills and cattle ranches could be established, causing the income of the Crown, and of the Portuguese population of Brazil, to rise. Nóbrega believed that the subjugation of the Indians would not be that costly, for the Portuguese colonists would help the governor with their slaves, as would Indians allied with the Portuguese.⁵⁷

Mem de Sá's military campaign brought war the likes of which had not been seen before in Bahia. He ordered the men of an entire Indian village killed and the women and children brought back to Salvador as war captives. "Never has another such war been waged in this land," wrote a Jesuit, and "not only these Indians, but the whole coast will be shocked and afraid."⁵⁸ The Portuguese

exploited the power of their horses, ships, and guns in battle and gained an edge over the coastal groups in Bahia and Ilhéus. Mem de Sá's campaign eliminated many formerly independent and powerful Indian chiefs around Salvador who used to negotiate directly with the governor.

The campaign also led to the consolidation of the formerly independent Indian villages, as well as a few villages where the Jesuits had already begun evangelization by building small churches and schools, into large mission villages (*aldeias*) under the control of the governor and the Jesuits, who not only taught them Christianity but transformed their ways of life. The *aldeias* of São Paulo, Santiago, São João, and Espírito Santo were established along the coast in 1557, Santo Antonio was founded in 1560, and Santa Cruz on the island of Itaparica was set up in 1561.⁵⁹ The *aldeias* were to become a hallmark of the Jesuit mission in Brazil.

The first Jesuits accepted Mem de Sá's violent campaigns with little if any criticism. José de Anchieta later wrote a long poem in Latin praising the exploits and sacrifices of Sá and lauding the creation of the first *aldeias* in Bahia. Sá appears in the poem as a hero, a pious and magnanimous governor, a bringer of laws, and the one who put an end to cannibalism. Other Jesuits agreed. Sá had "punished some" and "yoked all," wrote a Jesuit to Lisbon in April 1558, which opened up a "new way of proceeding" that had not been seen before in Brazil. Through fear and subjection, wrote another Jesuit in September of the same year, the Jesuits were beginning to harvest the "fruit" promised by the land of Brazil.⁶⁰

That force had been used to create the foundation for the first Jesuit *aldeias* did not mean that the Jesuits had entirely abandoned their belief in the power of persuasion. From the Jesuit letters, it appears that most Jesuits saw Mem de Sá's campaign as inevitable, and they welcomed the new beginning that the creation of the mission villages afforded. Within the more controlled environment of the villages, Jesuit evangelists could return to their preferred approach: persuasion through teaching, preaching, and conversation. The new beginning allowed the Jesuits to regain their optimism, which had wavered as their first decade in Brazil came to an end.⁶¹

Some of this optimism, as well as the return to the Jesuit strategy of converting through persuasion, can be seen in what was one of the first Jesuit plays performed in Brazil. On Christmas night in 1561, in Piratininga, José de Anchieta's *Pregação universal* (Universal Sermon) was performed outside the Jesuit church. The three-hour, five-act play was directed at Indians and Portuguese alike, and it used three languages: Portuguese, Tupi, and Spanish. The play made use of a

character familiar in Portuguese drama of the time—a miller—who jealously guards his beautiful coat. In Anchieta's drama, the miller, named Adam, appears humbled and ragged in act one because his Sunday clothes (symbolic of Divine Grace) have been stolen by his sins. In act two, the devil, named Guaixará, the name of an Indian chief, appears along with his ally, Aimbiré, who also bears the name of a powerful chief; both speak Tupi.⁶²

This second act, spoken only in Tupi, takes the form of a long dialogue that repeats many of the themes that Jesuits stressed in their mission. First the chiefs / devils celebrate the Indian ways, proclaiming that it is good to drink caum, to dance, to tattoo the body in red and black, to cover the body in feathers, to be a curer, to inhale smoke, to live for killing and eating prisoners, and to live with many women. When the guardian angel of the Christian Indian village appears, also speaking in Tupi, a dialogue ensues between the chiefs / devils and the angel. The angel questions the right of the chiefs / devils to treat the Indians of the village as their property. But the chiefs / devils then proceed to list all the failings of the Indians to the angel, underscoring how far Indians are from the Christian ideal. At first the angel responds only that confession exists as a cure for all ills. But then, unwilling to listen to any more of the chiefs' / devils' speaking, the angel throws them out of the village, sending them to hell, and declares to the audience:

Be happy my children and rise up!
To protect you, I am here; I come from heaven!
Gather round me; I will give you all of my aid!
(2.393–398)

Believe in the Creator, and accept his law
with submission and with love.
Obey the doctrine, from the Priest,
your instructor.

(2.426–430)

Act three returns to the sins of the Portuguese in Brazil. Although this part of the play is largely lost, it is thought that twelve sinners process, speaking of their sins in Anchieta's poetic verse. In act four, twelve Indian children, students from the Jesuit school, dance and sing. In act five, the miller regains his Sunday dress, much more beautiful than the original, for it has been woven by his daughter, Maria, with the help of her son, Jesus.⁶³

Performed at night, with music and costumes, such a theatrical piece undoubtedly was a powerful teaching tool for the Jesuits. Their representation of Indian chiefs as devils, and the Indian ways of life as evil, underscored the role that Jesuits saw for themselves as interpreters of God's will for the Indians. The guardian angel declares in the play that the Jesuits are instructors—the intermediaries who make it possible for Indians to learn the Christian doctrines.

The Jesuits also saw themselves as the preferred, and indeed crucial, intermediaries between colonists and Indians. This can clearly be seen in 1563, when Nóbrega and Anchieta led a mission to establish peace with the Tupinambá Indians living on the coast to the north of São Vicente and around Guanabara Bay. This episode well demonstrates how go-betweens played pivotal roles in the negotiation of power between the Indian and European worlds.

Nóbrega, ordered to turn over the leadership of the Brazilian province to Luís da Grã and to retire to São Vicente to improve his health, arrived in São Vicente sometime before 1 June 1560. Nóbrega quickly perceived danger in São Vicente. He had sailed from Bahia with Mem de Sá, who led an armada to expel the French from their colony founded by Villegagnon in Rio de Janeiro. Sá attacked and took possession of the French fort in March of 1560 but retreated to São Vicente to repair his ships and regroup. Nóbrega wrote from São Vicente to Dom Henrique (known in English as Cardinal Prince Henry), then regent of Portugal, explaining that it was very necessary to settle Rio de Janeiro and to create another city like Salvador there to protect São Vicente to the south and Espírito Santo to the north.⁶⁴

The Tupinambá, the traditional allies of the French in Rio de Janeiro, were the major source of concern, for they were the mortal enemies of the Tupinikin, who had allied themselves with the Portuguese in São Vicente. The attack on the French fortress by Mem de Sá did not stop the Tupinambá from continuing to raid the Portuguese farms and settlements in São Vicente. In the words of one Jesuit, the Tupinambá attacked incessantly the “slaves, women, and children of the Christian” settlers of São Vicente. A more dangerous situation arose the next year when a faction of the Tupinikin Indians of the Piratininga Plateau turned against the Portuguese. In July of 1561, the town of São Paulo found itself under attack from this rival group of Tupinikin, who had acquired allies among their former Tupinambá enemies. Only the leadership of Tibiriçá saved the settlement. When Tibiriçá died the next year, the need for a peaceful overture to the Tupinambá seemed clear.⁶⁵

In a detailed letter to the head of the Society of Jesus in Rome, José de Anchieta recounts how he and Manoel da Nóbrega served as hostages so that a peace deal with the Tupinambá could be struck. Nóbrega and Anchieta left the fort of Bertioga in São Vicente in April of 1563 as passengers on two ships that headed 20 leagues (approximately 124 kilometers) north along the coast, past São Sebastião Island, and anchored off Iperoig, the very place where Hans Staden had been held captive nine years before. Canoes of Tupinambá met the Portuguese ships, and after various verbal exchanges, as well as the taking of hostages on each side to ensure peaceful intentions, and after an Indian woman vouched for the Jesuits, the Tupinambá invited the Jesuits ashore. With eight or nine Portuguese, Nóbrega and Anchieta visited two villages in the vicinity. Anchieta describes himself as “speaking in a loud voice from house to house in their custom,” telling the Tupinambá that “they should be happy with our arrival and friendship” and that “we wished to stay among them and teach them the things of God so that God would give them abundant food, health, and victory over their enemies.” Twelve youths of the villages boarded one of the ships and returned to São Vicente to serve as hostages for the lives of Nóbrega and Anchieta while peace was being discussed. Iperoig was the southern frontier of the Tupinambá, and the second ship, which also carried hostages, continued north for Guanabara Bay, where another peace overture was also planned.⁶⁶

Nóbrega and Anchieta went to live in one of the houses of the Tupinambá and began the now familiar Jesuit strategies for evangelization. They gathered the children, boys and girls, as well as some adults, and taught basic doctrines. They set up an altar, and Nóbrega began to say daily mass at dawn. They advised continually that cannibalism must be ended. In return, the Tupinambá treated the Jesuits well, even offering them women to be their wives. Anchieta writes that he understood this custom to be an honor, and noted that European men who accepted Indian women in this way became sons-in-law and brothers-in-law; nevertheless, he describes himself as insisting over and over again that this was, in their case, an offense to God.⁶⁷

The two Jesuits had arrived during a time when a large war party was away, and Nóbrega and Anchieta knew that when the warriors returned, they might well be put to death. Two canoes arrived in the vanguard of the war party, one carrying the “great chief” named Pindobuçu, and the second, the brother of the man who had allowed the Jesuits to stay in the house in the village. When

this man heard that there were Jesuits in the house, he gave an order for them to leave. His son-in-law appeared while Anchieta was packing, and the following dialogue repeated by Anchieta purportedly took place at the doorway of the longhouse while the son-in-law held his sword in hand:

Son-in-law: "Who is this?"

Father-in-law: "The Portuguese."

Son-in-law: "A Portuguese?"

Anchieta: "I am your friend and will be with you in the future."

Son-in-law, haughtily and indignantly: "I don't want your company."⁶⁸

Chief Pindobucu, however, according to Anchieta, did desire peace and made no move to expel the Jesuits from the village. Anchieta describes this chief as very interested in talk, and he quickly fell into conversation with the Jesuits about heaven, hell, and how the Jesuits controlled their desire for women. A few days later, ten more canoes arrived, led by a chief known to be a great enemy of the Portuguese and a loyal ally to the French. This chief had a French son-in-law and a French-Tupinambá *métisse* (mixed-race) granddaughter; his French son-in-law was following with four more canoes of warriors. The chief, as Anchieta tells it, had learned of the presence of the Jesuits in the villages and had resolved to kill them. But his French son-in-law met the ship that had left Anchieta and Nóbrega at Iperoig and that was heading for Rio de Janeiro to make peace overtures there. The captain of the ship was not a Portuguese, but a Genoese by the name of José Adorno who owned a sugar mill in São Vicente.⁶⁹ Because he was Italian and spoke French, when the Frenchman boarded the ship, he persuaded him to agree to a peace. The Frenchman sent a message to his father-in-law with one of his Indian brothers-in-law, counseling him to accept the peace, while he turned back to Rio de Janeiro with letters from the Genoese captain requesting peace with the French. The Frenchman further recommended that the ship from São Vicente not proceed any deeper into Tupinambá territory until the peace could be concluded. Adorno's ship then headed back for Iperoig.

Back in the villages, however, the Frenchman's father-in-law mistrusted the Portuguese offer of peace. Anchieta describes him as sitting in a hammock, dressed in a shirt, with a bow and arrows in his hand, stubbornly reminding Anchieta and Nóbrega of the many evils he had suffered at the hands of the Portuguese. One such episode included a time when he had been taken as a slave, but he had escaped by diving off a Portuguese ship and swimming ashore, despite the fact that his feet were shackled with iron. That night, some of the

men in the villages hatched a plot to take over the Portuguese ship and to kill Captain Adorno as well as the Jesuits. The next day, the chief arrived dressed in a very fine black coat (*sayo negro bien fino*), which Anchieta's words make clear was a European garment, armed with a sword, and surrounded by many of his armed men. Anchieta implies that his men only waited for the first word uttered in Portuguese, which would unleash an instant, violent death. But the chief first talked things over with another Frenchman who accompanied him, and asked him to point out the captain of the ship. The Frenchman intervened on the side of the captain, explaining that he was a man who spoke French well, and that he had come to make peace with the Tupinambá, as well as with all the French in Rio de Janeiro. Anchieta then clued Captain Adorno, who did not speak Tupi, to explain, in French, that he was not a Portuguese but a Genoese, and a great friend of the French. Only then would the chief begin to discuss peace.

According to Anchieta, the price of peace demanded by this chief was to be paid in captives—the Tupinikin allies of the Portuguese and the enemies of the Tupinambá. In particular, Anchieta writes, the chief wanted the chiefs so that they could be killed and eaten. Captain Adorno made his exit by saying that he had no authority to promise such things, but that he would return to São Vicente and present the demand. Anchieta and Nóbrega remained behind, making clear that no Indians should be given in exchange for the peace, and that if lives were to be given, it would be those of the Jesuits.

Their position in the villages remained tenuous, but time after time Anchieta describes how he and Nóbrega were able to continually avoid what seemed to be certain death. Although Anchieta attributes their safety to Divine Providence, it is clear that the Jesuits' ability to speak Tupi and the protection offered by powerful men in the villages saved them. In addition to Pindobuçu, Anchieta introduces another chief by name, Cuñambeba, who had a small church built for Nóbrega to say mass in and ordered that no one harm or speak ill of the Jesuits. But his protection, Anchieta believed, was not the reason that they were not killed and cannibalized by "such an evil, bestial, and bloodthirsty people." Rather, much like Hans Staden, Anchieta saw their survival, among many who would have liked to kill them, as evidence of the hand of God. Nóbrega decided to return to São Vicente in June of 1563, leaving Anchieta in Iperoig with another Portuguese man as principal hostages. Anchieta remained a hostage until September 1563, when Cuñambeba and twenty others brought Anchieta by canoe to the fortress of Bertioiga in São Vicente.⁷⁰

Anchieta's sojourn among the Tupinambá was intended to be a symbol of the goodwill of the Portuguese as they lobbied for peace, but Anchieta later realized that it was more a case of "an end of peace and a beginning of a new war." While the Tupinambá of Iperoig with whom Anchieta lived kept the peace, other Tupinambá did not. Anchieta spent little time lamenting the failure of the peace to take hold. He remarks in a letter that this is what one expects from "a people so bestial and bloodthirsty."⁷¹

The negotiated peace broke down as the Portuguese made their move into Guanabara Bay. Anchieta describes how he and Nóbrega sailed back up the coast, stopping briefly in Iperoig to collect Anchieta's books, reaching Guanabara Bay in March of 1564. There, an armada led by Mem de Sá's nephew, Estácio de Sá, had attempted to take possession of the island where Villegagnon had once built the French colony. Anchieta and Nóbrega found clear signs that the Tupinambá resisted the disembarkation of the Portuguese fleet: they found houses burned and corpses exhumed. Despite this unsettling beginning, Anchieta nevertheless viewed a settlement in Rio de Janeiro as highly desirable. Not only would it extinguish the influence of the French Calvinists, but he believed that it would serve as a "great door" for the conversion of the Tupinambá.⁷²

The men of the Society of Jesus who disembarked in Brazil in the 1550s set themselves the impossible goal of converting all the native peoples of Brazil to Christianity. To begin their mission, they saw the need to turn themselves into go-betweens. Correia, Brazil's first Jesuit martyr, symbolized this role, as did Anchieta and Nóbrega in Iperoig. Most Jesuits were transactional go-betweens in far less visible, but no less important, ways. Teaching, translating, praying, absolving, the Jesuits created roles for themselves as mediators between Indians and God. But Jesuits filled yet another role as go-betweens: just as any European who crossed the Atlantic became a physical go-between, so, too, did they. Physical go-betweens were biological go-betweens, and as biological go-betweens, they unwittingly and unknowingly forever altered the biology and ecology of Brazil.

5. *Biology*

. . . dysentery, cough, headache, fevers, and other sicknesses from which we die!

Chief Pindobuçu, 1563

When José de Anchieta wrote the long letter about his residence as a hostage among the Tupinambá, he quoted Chief Pindobuçu, preaching through the village:

If we are afraid of our shaman, how much more should we fear these [Jesuit] priests . . . because they have the power to bring to us the dysentery, cough, headache, fevers, and other sicknesses from which we die!¹

As remembered and recorded by Anchieta, Chief Pindobuçu spoke these words to impress upon his villagers the power of the Jesuits, but in so doing, Pindobuçu identified one of the most powerful and devastating roles of the go-between: that of disease carrier.

Geographer Alfred Crosby pointed out in 1972 that Europeans brought more than their weapons, their religious worldview, and their desire for wealth to the encounter between the “old” world and the “new”; they brought their diseases, foods, and domestic animals. Disease, argues Crosby, was a major factor in the rapid Spanish defeat of the indigenous cultures of the Americas.² Whereas outbreaks of epidemic disease accompanied colonization in the Spanish Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru, in Brazil the pattern was different. The first outbreaks of disease in Brazil did not lead to the immediate demise of indigenous groups. It was not until significant colonization began fifty years after the discovery of Brazil that disease, in conjunction with the introduction of European and African domestic

animals, sugar cultivation, and slavery, wreaked havoc on the independent and autonomous Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples of Brazil. Sustained European settlement, with its concomitant ecological change, violent warfare, and slavery, all intensified the effect of disease after 1550.³

The history of disease in sixteenth-century Brazil, as well as the transformation in the landscape, remains largely unstudied. Compared to Spanish America, Brazil has far fewer sources from which to reconstruct the biological and ecological changes of the sixteenth century, and it has generated less interest among historians.⁴ “Snatches” of conversations and observations of reactions remain from the indigenous side, but these are generally filtered through European eyes, such as Anchieta’s record of Pindobuçú’s speech. Undoubtedly, dreams, myths, and oral histories became vehicles through which representational go-betweens on the Indian side recorded and interpreted the changes to their worlds; fragments of such representations might still survive that could be analyzed today.⁵ Far more comprehensive and accessible is the European record—the letters of the Jesuits after 1549 in particular—that enables modern historians to reconstruct the changes taking place in Brazil.

Physical go-betweens—European and African—introduced new diseases to Brazil; they imported the first cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and chickens; they planted new, non-native plants, such as sugar and wheat; and many men fathered children of mixed race. Transactional go-betweens also spread disease. Because they facilitated contact between the European and the Indian worlds, and typically through language in face-to-face situations, transactional go-betweens created situations in which diseases could be exchanged. Representational go-betweens sought to explain the meaning of enormous changes, especially the shocking epidemics that decimated the indigenous populations.

Unlike Spanish America, where epidemics accompanied colonization, the first epidemics that likely occurred in Brazil before 1550 did not destroy the political or social structure of independent indigenous groups. Nor did the introduction of European and African domestic animals immediately degrade the coastal forests. But the increasing intensity of colonization after 1550 made outbreaks of disease more frequent and more severe. Simultaneously, imported Iberian pastoral traditions greatly increased the negative impact of domestic animals on the landscape. Between 1550 and 1580, Brazil began to follow a pattern similar to that seen in the Spanish Caribbean in the thirty years after 1492: significant outbreaks of disease coincided with the ratcheting up of the tempo of colonization.

The broad contours of the history of epidemic disease in the Americas are well known. Scholars agree that at least five diseases arrived in the Americas from Europe and Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: smallpox, measles, influenza, scarlet fever, and yellow fever. Many medical historians add to this list mumps, rubella, pneumonia, pertussis, anthrax, bubonic plague, malaria, and typhus. Humans themselves hosted more than half of these disease agents, and the others were carried to the Americas in nonhuman hosts—in insects and animals brought to the Americas as a result of human action.⁶ Many of these diseases were “habitually prevalent,” or endemic, in Europe, Africa, and Asia, where they erupted periodically and largely sickened children, allowing those who survived to harbor immunities against subsequent outbreaks.⁷ But when human and nonhuman hosts carried the viral, bacterial, and protozoal agents that spread these diseases to the Americas, they became epidemic, affecting all age groups with very high mortality.⁸

That these diseases were endemic among European, African, and Asian peoples but not among the peoples of the Americas is partially due to what Crosby terms the biological ally of the European conquistador: his domestic animals—pigs, cattle, horses, goats, sheep, and chickens.⁹ Many human diseases originate in animals, especially domesticated animals. Horses, cattle, and sheep were, according to William McNeil, “chronic bearers of viral and bacterial infections capable of invading and reinventing people.” The long coexistence of Europeans, Africans, and Asians with their domestic animals led to cycles of transfers of infectious agents from animals to humans, resulting in epidemics with “heavy die-offs of hosts and of disease organisms.” As cities grew in Europe, Africa, and Asia, diseases spread through person-to-person contact, contaminated water, and insects. Three major diseases that thrived among crowded human populations were smallpox, measles, and bubonic plague. According to McNeil, each major civilized region developed “its own peculiar mix” of diseases, each becoming a “diseased and disease-resistant” human population that in time became “biologically dangerous to neighbors unaccustomed to so formidable an array of infections.” Contact between previously isolated regions—through war, trade, migration, or colonization—created a breeding ground for the spread of disease. New trading routes fostered contact and spread epidemics, as did war. But over a long period of time, the devastation once caused by epidemic diseases greatly lessened as these diseases became endemic in the populations of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.¹⁰

The Americas, isolated from the rest of the world, did not participate in this exchange of diseases. Moreover, medical historians long assumed that the disease environment in the Americas was more benign. Fewer domestic animals meant that human populations in the Americas were less at risk. Wild herds of llamas and dogs in the Americas, it seemed, did not transfer infectious parasites to humans in the ways that had occurred in Europe, Asia, and Africa. McNeil writes that “with the possible exception of the guinea pig, the Amerindians’ domesticated species . . . were incapable of supporting infectious chains” such as had characterized Europe. Similarly, medical historians have argued that dense urban settlements in the Americas “suffered little from disease.”¹¹

Recent scholarship modifies this picture of the benign American health environment and suggests, on the contrary, that American indigenous populations before 1492 also suffered from epidemics, nutritional deficiencies, and famines. These historians and archaeologists maintain that infant and child mortality was high, and life expectancies were low. The major diseases in the Americas were bacterial and parasitic infections. Bacterial pneumonia, tuberculosis, typhus, and influenza all likely caused epidemics in the Americas before 1492. But major killers, such as smallpox, measles, bubonic plague, and cholera, did not develop. Although indigenous Americans shared many disease patterns with the rest of the world, as Suzanne Austin Alchon writes, they “were not immunologically prepared for the devastation that lay ahead.”¹²

William Denevan argues forcefully that the American landscape was not “pristine” in 1492, but that it had been affected by the humans—the Native Americans—who lived in it. Similarly, Warren Dean makes clear that the coastal Atlantic forest of Brazil had already experienced degradation at the hands of the Tupi groups living there.¹³ The first French and Portuguese ships that saw Brazil, therefore, saw a landscape that had been shaped by hunters, gatherers, and agriculturalists. A major difference between the American landscape and that of Iberia and West Africa was the absence of domestic animals, in particular, hooved animals, or ungulates.

Little is known about disease and the impact of domestic animals in Brazil during the first decades of the sixteenth century, but the same period in the Caribbean is well studied, providing a useful counterpoint. Medical historian Kenneth Kiple asserts that no other region has experienced “such a sudden and devastating ecological assault as the islands of the Caribbean with the arrival of the Europeans.” Although estimates of the population of the island of Hispaniola in 1492 vary

wildly, its decline is clear. According to data compiled by historical demographer Noble David Cook, estimates of the Indian population in 1508 placed it at 60,000; in 1510 it had fallen to 33,523; in 1514, to 26,334; in 1518–1519, to 18,000; and by 1542, to less than 2,000. The first outbreak of disease arrived with the 1,500 men on the seventeen ships that formed Columbus' second voyage of 1493. This expedition had the goal of establishing Spain's first American colony; hence the colonists brought with them plants and animals, among them pigs and horses. Cook sees many possibilities for this first epidemic: it might have been influenza or swine flu, smallpox, meningitis, typhus, dysentery, or malaria, or a combination of several of these in conjunction with malnutrition. Mortality among Europeans was high—even Columbus was very sick. Soon the indigenous population of the Caribbean was in alarming decline from subsequent sicknesses that were described as fevers in 1500 and 1502, influenza in 1514–1517, and smallpox in 1518–1525. An epidemic thought to be measles struck in 1529. Simultaneously, Spanish cattle, horses, and hogs from the Canary Islands overran the traditional *conucos*, or “mounds,” planted by the Native Americans. Native grasses were degraded by the new ungulates, while non-native grasses, accidentally introduced, took root. According to Caribbean historian Carl Sauer, “The pattern of livestock ranching for the New World was formed here.”¹⁴

It is highly likely that the ships in the brazilwood trade—the Portuguese *naus* and *caravelas* and the French *barques*—introduced diseases into Brazil in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹⁵ The lack of data makes it impossible to know the effect of these diseases on coastal indigenous groups, but it seems clear that for the first half of the century Brazil did not follow the Caribbean pattern. The primary reason for the difference was that many more physical go-betweens sailed to the Caribbean, as compared to Brazil. Warren Dean estimates that more than 330 ships landed along the Tupi coast of Brazil in the fifty years after 1500. This number is far smaller than the ships headed for India during the same period: 319 departures from Portugal between 1500 and 1529, and 192 from 1530 to 1559. The number making the voyage from Spain to the Caribbean was even higher. Pierre and Huguette Chanu count 185 ships that sailed from Spain to the Caribbean between 1509 and 1515 alone. The smaller number of sailings to Brazil suggests that the impact of disease on Brazil was more limited than had been the case in the Caribbean.¹⁶

Moreover, the first outbreak of disease in the Caribbean coincided with the arrival of a large expedition of men and domestic animals to a circumscribed

and highly localized area: an island. Subsequently, the independent indigenous chiefs of the island were rapidly deposed and the population divided into gangs of laborers serving the Spaniards. Then, the many sailings between Spain and the Caribbean reproduced these initial patterns on other islands.¹⁷ In contrast, the initial contact between Brazil and European and African ports took place on a much smaller scale over a long coastline. No immediate conquest of indigenous groups was attempted, and fewer domestic animals were immediately introduced into Brazil. The thinly scattered Europeans who lived in Brazil, with the possible exception of those living at trading posts, assimilated themselves into indigenous groups by marrying Indian women.

Although sailing the Atlantic was hardly healthy, predictable, or safe, the very first voyages to Brazil appear to have been disease free. Caminha's letter makes no mention of sickness breaking out during the first visit to Brazil. The anonymous account of a Portuguese man on the expedition mentions disease only when the armada reached East Africa, three months after they had left Brazil. This disease seems to have been scurvy, for the men improved rapidly after the king of Malindi sent lemons and oranges. Cabral commanded a large armada, which increased the possibility of introducing disease. Most of the subsequent sailings to Brazil were, in contrast, smaller in size. Vespucci made two trips to Brazil. The first, in 1501, had three ships. Two years later, six ships, one of which was under the command of Vespucci, set out from Portugal. But en route, the flagship sank and three others were lost before reaching Brazil. Only two of the six original ships actually reached the Bay of All Saints. On each voyage out, Vespucci describes the mood of the men. Commenting on the first voyage in his *Mundus novus* letter, Vespucci writes that "anxieties beset our spirits" on the sixty-odd-day voyage across the Atlantic and that "fear so overwhelmed us that we had almost abandoned all hope of survival." Regarding the psychological state of the men on the second expedition, Vespucci describes them as "unhappy" and "so afraid that I could not console them" when they feared the loss of the flagship. But Vespucci makes no mention of illness among the crew on either of the expeditions.¹⁸

Early accounts of Brazil extol the health of the land and its people. Caminha thought the fresh air of Brazil was the reason the bodies of the Indians "were so clean, so fat, and so beautiful that they could not be more so." One of the men on Cabral's voyage described the Indians as hale and hearty. Amerigo Vespucci describes a "very pleasant and temperate and healthy" land whose

inhabitants “do not sicken either from pestilence or corruption of the air, dying only natural deaths.” Vespucci comments on the longevity of the Indians, many of whom “had up to four generations of descendants.” One of the oldest men he met explained that “he had lived seventeen hundred lunar months, which by my reckoning must be 132 years, counting thirteen moons for every year.” Even accounting for Vespucci’s exaggeration, the clear impression he conveys is that Brazil was a land “filled with countless inhabitants,” one in which there was “no pestilence or illness” and the Indians, “unless they die a violent death, . . . live a long life.”¹⁹

Vespucci relates intimate contact between the indigenous peoples of Brazil and his European companions on his two voyages to Brazil. On the 1501–1502 expedition, sailing 1,800 leagues along the coast of Brazil (approximately 11,000 kilometers), the men landed on “several occasions,” and at one point the men lived among an Indian group for twenty-seven days. Vespucci writes, “I ate and slept among them.” He alludes also to sexual contact between Indian women and European men. On the 1503–1504 expedition, Vespucci remained at the Bay of All Saints for two months and four days waiting for the other ships in the original fleet; when they did not arrive, he sailed south 260 leagues (approximately 1,600 kilometers), where he built a fort and left behind twenty-four men.²⁰ This proximity between the European crew and Indians laid the groundwork, as did subsequent European expeditions, for miscegenation and the sharing of disease.

The first Brazilian Indian known to have sickened and died from an illness shared with Europeans was the Guarani Namoa, who died when Binot Paulmier de Gonneville, the French sea captain who made landfall along the coast of Brazil in 1504, attempted to take him to France. An experienced captain, Gonneville knew well that not all lands were healthy for European crews. In 1503, heading to India, he decided, after provisioning his single ship in the Cape Verde Islands, not to call along the shore of Africa because of the “dangers and diseases” there, but to sail well out into the ocean. Nevertheless, two-thirds of the crew came down with the “illness of the sea,” and six men died. Later the chief pilot died of “apoplexy,” possibly a stroke. The ship began to float, at the mercy of the sea, and lost its course, “which grieved all, given the necessity they had for water and to reprovision themselves on land.” Only the accidental discovery that they were near land saved the men on this ship, which anchored south of the Tropic of Capricorn, in what is today Santa Catarina in southern Brazil, in 1504.²¹

The expedition resided for six months among the Guarani, but the French account makes no mention of disease while there. After making the vessel

seaworthy, the French prepared to set sail, and the Guarani chief, Arosca, agreed to allow his son, a youth named Essomericq, to leave on the ship, along with a companion, a man of thirty-five to forty years named Namoa. Two months after they left the Guarani, a malignant fever spread through the ship and many Frenchmen and the two Indians became ill. Essomericq and Namoa were so stricken that the French crew debated whether to baptize them to save their souls, even though they had not been instructed in Christianity as was required. At first, the crew decided not to baptize the Indians, but after Namoa died, they changed their minds when Essomericq in turn lingered near death. Essomericq recovered, but the fever killed three Frenchmen, as well as Namoa, before it ran its course. The crew believed the “wasted and fetid” water of the ship was the cause of the fever and desired to land to obtain the meats and fresh water “that cure all the sick.” This ship made two subsequent stops in Brazil, possibly spreading the fever that had already struck many on the ship.²² Why a fever suddenly erupted on this ship, when the French crew and the Guarani had been living together for six months, apparently disease free, is an unsolved puzzle. Possibly the ship itself was the culprit, still carrying bacterial, viral, or protozoal agents festering in the bilgewater. Alternatively, one of the men was an asymptomatic carrier, and in the close quarters of the ship, the disease spread.²³

The known written historical record falls silent after Namoa’s death, and we learn of no more diseases in Brazil for twenty years. Yet, during this time, individual ships were calling regularly along the long brazilwood coast, making it likely that outbreaks of disease occurred. Still, Antonio Pigafetta does not mention disease while Magellan’s expedition of five ships and 237 men briefly called along the coast of Brazil in 1519. Pigafetta did pay attention to disease, for he relates the fact that later men did sicken and some died while in the Pacific. These men were ill from lack of food and scurvy. Twenty-nine men died, including an Indian whom they had taken from the coast of Brazil and a “giant” they had taken from Patagonia, south of the Río de la Plata.²⁴

Evidence of the introduction of disease in the very south of Brazil emerges when larger Spanish expeditions were sent to navigate the Strait of Magellan or to secure the Río de la Plata. García Jofre de Loaisa commanded an armada of seven ships and 450 men that had as its goal retracing Magellan’s route to reach the Moluccas, the spice islands of Indonesia. Leaving Spain in 1525, the seven ships first hailed the Canary Islands, then an island called San Mateo, located—men on the expedition later testified—off the coast of Africa near the equator.

There many men became sick from diarrhea and recovered after “many days.” Then the seven ships sailed across the Atlantic for Brazil, and continued south to the Strait of Magellan, making it possible for the men to carry disease. The next year (1526), when Sebastian Cabot’s fleet of four sailed for the Moluccas via the Strait of Magellan, disease was recorded among the crew after they arrived in southern Brazil. Luis Ramírez, a man on the expedition, wrote to his father that after arriving at Santa Catarina, he was “sick with fever.” Ramírez was “still unwell and exhausted” one month later. The trading log kept by a Spanish official in 1527, when the Spanish armada was anchored at Santa Catarina, confirms the presence of disease. The captain sent one of his men 35 leagues (approximately 194 kilometers) into the interior to find chickens for the ill; the factor traded for honey to make special syrups and acquired yams for a diet deemed better for the infirm. Numerous references indicate that Indians in Santa Catarina came into direct and indirect contact with these sick Europeans, even though we have no accounts of sickness among them.²⁵

The Spanish expedition of Pedro de Mendoza to the Río de la Plata, which left Spain in 1534, was sufficiently large to spread disease. It consisted of an armada of fourteen ships, 2,500 Spaniards, 150 Germans, and seventy-two horses. Unable to survive where Mendoza founded Buenos Aires in 1536, the men traveled nearly 1,000 miles up the Paraguay River and founded Asunción in 1537. Ulrich Schmidel, a German on this expedition, described three “very ill” Spaniards who were left among the Payzuno Guarani in approximately 1538. By the 1540s, Schmidel describes many occasions when the Spaniards in Paraguay, including the captain general, Cabeza de Vaca, were “very ill” or “with fever” or “ill to the point of death.”²⁶

The ships that called along the coast of Brazil carried domestic animals as part of their food supply. Pero Vaz de Caminha notes that Pedro Álvares Cabral showed the Indians of Brazil a sheep (*carneiro*) and a hen (*galinha*). Magellan’s armada of five ships carried six cows and three pigs when it left Spain in 1519, but these animals were intended for the consumption of the crew and would not have been left ashore by choice. From Luis Ramírez we learn that his ship headed for the Río de la Plata carried dogs, one of which had to be killed and eaten because the men were starving. Rats and mice were common fellow travelers; when they had run out of food in the mid-Pacific, Magellan’s men caught and sold the rats living on the ships. The rats had eaten much of the biscuit stores; what was left had turned to powder and stank of rats’ urine. Whether carried intentionally,

and even if reserved only for the crew, some of these domestic animals could and did swim ashore following shipwrecks.²⁷

Chickens appear to have been some of the first European domestic animals introduced into Brazil. Considered to be food especially beneficial to the sick, chickens were commonly carried aboard ship. In Santa Catarina in 1527, a Spanish official traded fishhooks, knives, mirrors, and combs for food, much of which was native to Brazil (venison, oysters, corn, fish meal), but among the items obtained were chickens, ducks, and pigs. In 1530, when the Portuguese settlement of São Vicente consisted of no more than twelve houses, "chickens and pigs from Spain" were abundant, and an entire small island had been turned over to the pigs.²⁸

When the first Portuguese settlements began, the numbers of domestic animals increased, but the nature and toll of disease, even on the few Portuguese in Brazil, remains unknown. Only a few scattered references appear in the written sources. When Martim Afonso de Sousa made his expedition along the coast of Brazil before founding the colony at São Vicente, his brother, Pero Lopes de Sousa, wrote in his diary that Martim Afonso put ashore the ill on his expedition; he left them at the brazilwood *feitoria* of Pernambuco. Later, Sousa described how he and his men were sick with fever near Guanabara Bay. The sixteenth-century historian Oviedo writes that as soon as Martim Afonso arrived at the Río de la Plata, some of his men began to get sick and die.²⁹

A few sketchy references allude to the existence of disease among European colonists in the 1540s, suggesting that the healthy picture of Brazil painted by Vespucci and Caminha was changing. Newly arrived Portuguese now generally required a year of "seasoning" before they could function normally. In 1545, the donatário Pero de Góis wrote his business partner about the need to recruit millers for the sugar factories; the men should be sent a year early, Góis recommended, because "the first year is always wasted by sickness and getting acclimatized."³⁰

The introduction of hoofed herbivores into Brazil most probably began with these first settlements and sugar plantations. Warren Dean believes that Martim Afonso de Sousa introduced cattle as part of the first royal colony at São Vicente, in 1532. By the time the Jesuits arrived in Brazil in 1549, stock populations were well established. In Nóbrega's "Information of the Lands of Brazil," penned in 1549, he states that oxen, cows, sheep, goats, and chickens were already present in Brazil, and increasing. In 1551, the Jesuit Afonso Brás, in extolling the fertility of Espírito Santo, stated that there were many wild pigs there. In 1554, the

Jesuit Luís da Grã commented that “all kinds of domestic animals are raised in great numbers . . . because the Christians [i.e., Portuguese colonists] have a great many pigs, oxen, goats, hens, ducks, etc.”³¹

The impact of ungulates on indigenous groups is unknown; however, by the 1550s, European domestic chickens had become common among coastal Tupinambá. André Thevet describes chickens that had been brought to the Tupinambá by the Portuguese, but noted that women would not eat their eggs. “Women absolutely will not eat them,” he states, “rather they become angry when they see a Christian eating four or five eggs at a meal . . . because they feel that for each egg, they are eating a chicken, which would be sufficient to feed two men.” Léry attributes the Tupinambá’s interest in chickens as related to their love for feathers; he recounts how they plucked the white down, dyed it red with brazilwood, cut the feathers into little pieces, and attached them to their bodies with a gum. In Bahia, an Indian youth from one of the surrounding villages presented Nóbrega with a hen in 1552; six years later, following the defeat of Indians in Paraguaçu (Bahia), the Indians were required to pay part of their tribute in hens.³²

The small Portuguese colonies began to transform the surrounding landscape with their agricultural practices. With slave labor, sugar became the essential cash crop of Brazil in the sixteenth century. Beyond sugar, Portuguese settlements were slow to develop other European and African food crops. By 1554, “beautiful” wheat grew in São Vicente, but bread baked from wheat flour remained a luxury, available only in Bahia and Pernambuco. Instead, colonists adapted to the Indian staples of manioc flour and corn. Orchards that grew Mediterranean fruits—oranges, lemons, limes, citrons, figs, and quinces—were soon planted, as were grapes and vegetables commonly grown in Portugal. By the early seventeenth century, several plants had been introduced from Africa: the Angolan pea (pigeon pea), and *nachenim* (a grass), which slaves called *masa* (possibly millet).³³

Miscegenation was very much a part of the biological story of Brazil in the first half of the sixteenth century. Mixed-race and bicultural children became an integral part of the Portuguese settlements and were possibly part of the changing nature of Indian village life, too. Very few Portuguese women sailed to Brazil before 1550, and as a result, Portuguese men first began living with Indian women in Indian villages, beginning with João Ramalho and Diogo Álvares. With the founding of the first Portuguese settlements, Portuguese men continued to live with Indian women; Jerônimo de Albuquerque and his alliances

with Indian women in Pernambuco is one such example. The *mameluca* daughters of these unions between Portuguese men and Indian women proved to be attractive marriage partners for the next wave of European men who sought status in the growing settlements.³⁴ Other Portuguese men in the first settlements simply lived with their Indian slave women. A shocked Nóbrega noted during his first year in Brazil that Portuguese men believed that by baptizing their female slaves, they lessened their sin of living with several women outside of marriage.³⁵ The *mameluca* daughters of Indian slave women remained in Portuguese settlements, where they stepped into the role left vacant by the absence of Portuguese women. *Mameluca* women still spoke Tupi, but they were among the most ardent supporters of the first Jesuits. To them fell the task of shaping the identities of the first generations of children born in the Portuguese settlements in Brazil.

Less known, but potentially no less important, was the sexual contact between Indians and Africans, or Africans and Europeans. Miscegenation may have been one reason why the biological and ecological changes of the first half of the sixteenth century were absorbed by indigenous groups. Mixed-race children may have inherited some genetic resistance to disease, and the alliances between European men and Indian women facilitated the transfer of knowledge about the new domestic animals, seeds, and foods that were unloaded off the ships.

After Tomé de Sousa arrived in the Bay of All Saints in 1549 with soldiers, colonists, and the Jesuits, the pace of biological and ecological change accelerated rapidly. The arrival of significantly more physical go-betweens—Europeans and Africans—introduced wave after wave of epidemic disease that brought high mortality, especially to Indians. The Jesuits inadvertently intensified the severity of epidemic disease by creating large *aldeias* that congregated what had been separate and smaller independent Indian villages. Similarly, as sugar plantations spread, the number of Indian slaves on the plantations increased, creating ideal conditions for epidemic disease. After 1550, the numbers of domestic animals increased, and the pastoral tradition quickly grew. Land grants distributed to colonists for sugar plantations and ranches occupied lands formerly used for indigenous hunting grounds or as buffer zones between hostile groups.

Although there is no record of an immediate outbreak of disease in the Bay of All Saints after the arrival of Tomé de Sousa, the greater contact between Europeans, Africans, and Indians considerably increased that possibility. Tomé de Sousa first describes a “fever” in 1551, two years after his appearance in

Brazil; this fever affected an Indian group not allied with the Portuguese. It erupted after several *degredados* who deserted from Salvador approached an enemy village by boat. There, because they were seen as enemies, the Indians killed and cannibalized them. To punish the Indian village for their cannibalism, Governor Tomé de Sousa sent Pero de Góis, his captain who patrolled the coast by ship, to burn the village and imprison the chiefs. Subsequently, the governor reported that those whom Góis had spared had died from fever.³⁶

Beginning in 1552, three years into the Jesuits' mission in Brazil, their letters regularly comment on diseases among the Indians. A Jesuit letter written in May of 1552 begins with the statement that many Indians in Bahia had recently died in such great numbers that it seemed to be an "odd thing." This "great mortality" affected four Indian villages where the Jesuits had been preaching, where "the young as well as the adults died," but especially infants. A powerful chief of Bahia, called *Puerta Grande* by the Jesuits, died in "a terrible death" in four days; another chief and his wife fell into an illness that "left them dry"; and a son of a chief became sick with a long illness until he became skin and bones. In a summary letter, also written in May of 1552, brother Vicente Rodrigues called the epidemic a "general cough from which many died." The result was that the Indians began to associate the Jesuits, Christian baptism, and Latin prayers with disease and death. Jesuit letter writers recounted that when the Indians saw the Jesuits arriving at their villages, they fled and hid their children or burned peppers, which, with their stinging smoke, kept the Jesuits from entering the villages. This high mortality suggests the outbreak of an epidemic, possibly influenza. It is likely the first recorded epidemic in Brazil.³⁷

Governor Tomé de Sousa undertook a visitation of all the settlements along the coast of Brazil in 1552–1553 immediately after this epidemic swept the Indian villages of the Bay of All Saints. His armada left the diseased environment of Bahia sometime after September 1552, encountered disease near Rio de Janeiro, and arrived in São Vicente before February of 1553. Sousa's retinue included many *degredados* destined to be colonists in the southern settlements. This armada hailed the ports of Porto Seguro and Espírito Santo and entered Guanabara Bay on its way to São Vicente. Also accompanying Souza were Manoel da Nóbrega, Francisco Pires (another Jesuit priest), and several young Indian boys who were being raised by the Jesuits to serve as interpreters. In Guanabara Bay, an illness broke out, and many became sick. The Jesuit fathers on board, fearing that death would come to many, confessed all of the sick. None died; but shortly

thereafter the Jesuits visited some inland Indian villages that were allied with the Portuguese. After the ships sailed from Rio de Janeiro, Nóbrega became sick, as did Pires. Nóbrega had a fever and had to be bled twice; Pires had *câmaras* (diarrhea).³⁸ Thus, the men and women in the armada, as well as the Jesuits, quite likely carried disease along the coast of Brazil in 1552 and 1553, and introduced it into São Vicente, where by 1554 a major epidemic raged among the recently converted Indians of Piratininga.

These first illnesses described in the Jesuit letters were undoubtedly similar to, but most likely more severe than, previous outbreaks of disease in the first half of the sixteenth century. The greater numbers of physical go-betweens in Brazil, the larger size of settlements, and the growing contact between coastal regions of Brazil increased the possibilities for diseases to spread. Even so, independent indigenous groups were still able to absorb the epidemics in the 1550s. Unlike the first outbreaks in the Caribbean, which accompanied an almost total breakdown in indigenous social structure, coastal Tupi groups withstood the first epidemics. Hans Staden witnessed firsthand the outbreak of illness among the Tupinambá, making his account important for assessing the impact of disease on an independent Indian village. The many details Staden provides make it possible to see how disease might have spread along the coast, through trade, warfare, and cannibalism. His account also makes clear that the Tupinambá weathered the disease without complete social disintegration.

The Tupinambá held Staden captive in 1554 at the same time that an epidemic was consuming Indians in Piratininga. The Jesuit interpreter Pero Correia wrote that in July 1554, almost every day, death struck among “those whom we had made Christians.” Three chiefs died, as did many Indian men and women. Two months later, after Nóbrega decided to send several Christian Guarani Indians along with some Jesuits on a mission to the Guarani, “an illness attacked them suddenly from which nearly all died.” The next year, at a mission that the Jesuits had established even deeper inland than their residence at Piratininga, nearly all the Indians became sick, and the greater part died.³⁹

The village of seven longhouses, Uwattibi (Ubatuba), where the Tupinambá held Staden, had plenty of contact with outside groups, any one of which might have introduced disease. Not only had they recently captured Staden on a raid outside the fort of Bertioaga, near São Vicente, but the Norman interpreter Karwattuware visited them regularly. A Guarani Indian slave who had lived among the Tupinambá group holding Staden became sick six months after Staden had

been taken prisoner. When the slave had been ill for nine or ten days, Staden writes that the Indians wanted him to bleed this “man who had lost an eye from his disease” and whose “appearance was horrible.” Unable to draw blood, the Indians decided, according to Staden, to “kill him before he is dead.” Staden, observing that his Tupinambá hosts planned to eat the body, writes, “I warned them that he was a sick man, and they might also fall sick if they ate him.” Despite his warning, Staden reports that “they devoured everything except the head and intestines, which they did not fancy, on account of the man’s sickness.”⁴⁰

In Staden’s eyes, the cannibalism of this sick Guarani was further proof of the savagery of the Tupinambá, but cannibalism may have been another means for the spread of disease. Prisoners captured in war by enemies were a kind of physical go-between, because they lived in intimate contact with an indigenous group before they were put to death. Moreover, cannibalism has been associated with the spread of a disease known as kuru among the Fore peoples who are based in modern-day Papua New Guinea.⁴¹

Immediately before illness broke out among them, the villagers of Uwattibi (Ubatuba) had had recent contact with two groups, an Indian war party and a ship, both from São Vicente. The illness began a little more than two weeks after a war party of Tupinikin attacked the village, and on failing to defeat Uwattibi, the Tupinikin war party moved on to the village of Mambukabe, some four miles away, and burned it. Staden’s captor, Jeppipo Wasu, went to Mambukabe to help rebuild it. In his absence, a Portuguese ship from São Vicente stopped “within speaking distance” of Uwattibi, and a verbal exchange took place between the Portuguese on the ship and the Tupinambá on land.⁴² Staden relates that soon after this, Jeppipo Wasu’s brother returned from the village of Mambukabe with the news that “the others were all sick”: Jeppipo Wasu himself, his mother, and his children. Soon the ill returned to Uwattibi and began to die: “a child died first, then the king’s mother, an old woman . . . some days later a brother died, and then again a child, and then another brother, that one who had first brought me news of their illness.” Jeppipo Wasu eventually recovered, as did one of his wives, but Staden writes that “there died of his family some eight persons.”⁴³ A woodcut in the Marburg edition of Staden’s account depicts the mourning of the dead in Uwattibi (Fig. 5.1).

The illness that threatened the family of Jeppipo Wasu in Uwattibi may have been the same devastating sickness occurring on the Piratininga Plateau in that same year. Yet, when Anchieta became a hostage among the Tupinambá in 1563,



Figure 5.1. Mourning the dead in Jeppipo Wasu's family. Hans Staden, *Warhaftige Historia und Beschreibung einer Landschafft* (Marburg, 1557). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

the tribal social structure was still functioning, and some of the same chiefs appear to have been alive still.⁴⁴ Similarly, when Nóbrega returned to Bahia in 1557, the epidemic of 1552, and possibly others, had not weakened the Indian villages so as to destroy their threat to the Portuguese settlement. Nóbrega despaired at the proud and stubborn independence of the Indian chiefs who led the villages in the Bay of All Saints, and as a result gave his support to Mem de Sá's military campaign to subjugate them.⁴⁵

Colonization brought an increased pace of transatlantic crossings. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of ships crossing the Atlantic after 1550, it is very clear that their number increased dramatically and that the incidence of disease on the transatlantic voyages became the norm rather than the exception. The

colonization enterprise launched by the French immediately introduced, or coincided with, an outbreak of disease. In 1555, when the French established a colony in Rio de Janeiro under the leadership of Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, one of Villegagnon's two ships arrived in Brazil carrying disease. The ships had provisioned themselves in the Cape Verde Islands. André Thevet described the air at Cape Verde as "pestilential and unhealthy" and commented that "hot fevers" and the "*flux de sang*" (bloody flux, or dysentery) were very common there, especially among the slaves. After leaving Cape Verde, the ships were unable to find the winds to take them across the Atlantic, and they continued south along the coast of Guinea, where they "lingered little because of the infection of the air," to São Tomé, inhabited by peoples whom Thevet describes as "much more subject to illnesses than those north [of the equator]." Men on one of the ships came down with a fever, believed by the men to be caused by the extreme heat of Africa, but the pilot also noted that the water on board was "stinking and foul" and that "the men on board could not refrain from drinking" it. The men on the second ship, however, remained "healthy and fresh." This "pestilential fever," wrote Nicholas Barré, a pilot on the second ship, "was so contagious and deadly that of one hundred persons, it did not spare but ten who did not become sick; of the ninety who became sick, five died." They ran out of fresh water in the mid-Atlantic, when all that remained was the stagnant water collected in the gutters. When Villegagnon's two ships reached the coast of Brazil in November of 1555, some men were still ill. The Franciscan André Thevet was so sick that he could not participate in the celebration of the Christmas mass one month later.⁴⁶

After Villegagnon arrived in Brazil, "pestilential fever" broke out among the Tupinambá allies of the French living around Guanabara Bay. Thevet describes meeting one of the chiefs, named Pindahousou, whom he found "sick in his bed with a continual fever."⁴⁷ Because Thevet was only in Brazil for ten weeks, this illness had to have been sometime between 10 November 1555 and 31 January 1556. Nicholas Barré, Villegagnon's pilot, credited this fever as the reason why the Tupinambá did not rise up against Villegagnon and force him from Guanabara following the souring of relations between Villegagnon and the Norman interpreters. He wrote to his friends in France: "The Savages have been persecuted by a pestilential fever since we arrived here, from which more than eight hundred have died."⁴⁸

Using the descriptions of Staden, Léry, and Thevet, Warren Dean calculates the size of the Tupinambá population living on the coast of Rio de Janeiro

in 1555 at between 57,000 and 63,000 persons, with a population density of 4.8/km². Since the Tupinambá resided in villages where individuals lived in close proximity to one another in large multifamily longhouses, known as *malocas*, the disease could spread easily. According to Staden, each village had up to seven malocas, which formed a sort of square, around the whole of which was a wooden palisade. Each maloca was 14 feet wide and up to 150 feet long; inside, the chief of the hut had his space in the center, while couples strung their hammocks along the sides.⁴⁹

Two years later a terrible illness erupted on the ship that carried the third governor to Brazil, Mem de Sá. In April 1557, Mem de Sá set out from Lisbon with 336 persons, and according to brief accounts of a few on board, nearly everyone became sick, including the governor himself, and 44 died. The ship apparently sailed from Lisbon to the Cape Verde Islands and from there attempted to cross the Atlantic, but because the weather was unfavorable, or because they had become lost, the ship stopped at the island of Príncipe, where the crew again provisioned the ship. Leaving Príncipe, they again failed to find favorable winds and put in at São Tomé, where they remained for a time. The entire voyage lasted an unprecedented eight months. Exactly when and where the illness broke out is unclear, but it seems to have come from one of the Atlantic islands.⁵⁰

More ships brought more Europeans—colonists, *degredados*, and crew—and African slaves, all of whom increased the probability of the introduction of disease. Port cities hold important clues to understanding the transfer of disease. For example, Caribbean historians can link outbreaks of plague in port cities with Atlantic sailings.⁵¹ Ships sailing to Brazil from Portugal typically began their journey in Lisbon and stopped at the Atlantic islands off the coast of Africa, such as the Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé, or Príncipe, before crossing the Atlantic. French ships also followed this route. Outbreaks of illness in the ports that typically sent ships to Brazil, such as Lisbon, Dieppe, Honfleur, São Tomé, Príncipe, or the Cape Verde Islands, would be an important piece of information in the puzzle, but it still remains unknown.

Ships themselves bore much of the blame. Not only did the transatlantic ships sail from port cities, often the most disease-ridden places in Europe, but they became physical floating links between worlds. As early as the fourteenth century, Europeans recognized the role of ships in transmitting disease, notably plague. Historians have long thought that the bubonic plague that raged through Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe in the mid-fourteenth century

appeared first in the ports, carried by ships that harbored infected rats. Ships carried humans, animals, plants, and insects, as well as trash, water, and food—all hosts for viral, bacterial, protozoal, and botanical agents that would impact the biology and ecology of the places where they landed.⁵²

Fevers, dysentery, and diarrhea seem to have been some of the most common diseases in sixteenth-century Brazil, and all of these were aided in their spread by the cramped quarters found on ships. When dysentery (*câmaras de sangue*) and diarrhea broke out at sea, the conditions quickly became deplorable. The lack of clean drinking water and the close contact with human feces are obvious factors in their spread. On one ship headed for India in 1551 traveled several Jesuits, who wrote accounts of the voyage after they arrived in India. Off the coast of Africa, they report that eighty on board became sick, and the Jesuits began to nurse the ill. Antonio de Heredia describes the sick lying in the filth from their intestines; Manuel Teixeira describes having to beg for food for the ill, who had little to eat. Some disease-ridden ships headed for India visited Brazil en route. One such ship left Lisbon in April of 1560 and, unable to catch the right winds, became lost off the coast of Guinea during the month of June. More than four hundred people became sick with fever, and some died. Because the ship could not make it around the Cape of Good Hope, it sailed to Brazil, where the ship arrived in August of 1560. There, the Jesuit Manuel Álvarez was still so sick with fever that he could hardly walk to the Jesuit residence.⁵³ After the ill disembarked, the lack of adequate sanitary disposal meant that drinking water and food could easily become contaminated.

An epidemic that might have been dysentery struck Espírito Santo in 1559, claiming the lives of free and enslaved Indians, affecting babies and adults alike. Jesuit Antônio de Sá described it as “*prioris*,” possibly pleurisy, and “dysentery so severe that it seemed like a plague.” The illness lasted for six days. On some days they buried thirteen bodies, and because there was not enough room, they placed two to a grave. In all, he estimated that the epidemic took the lives of six hundred Indian slaves. The epidemic had begun south of the settlement, between Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo. There a French ship had been loading brazilwood, raising the possibility that the ship had introduced the disease. A few months later, the disease had nearly run its course, for in the month of March, only eight had died. An epidemic of dysentery spread in Piratininga Plateau in 1561, especially among the Indian slaves, and so many died that José de Anchieta thought it was “like a pestilence.” Dysentery caused the death of

the powerful Indian chief of Piratininga, Martim Afonso Tibiriçá, according to Anchieta. Tibiriçá died in December of 1562.⁵⁴

Jesuits suffered from dysentery, too. A Jesuit interpreter sent to confess the soldiers and to teach the Indians who accompanied Mem de Sá on his attack against the French colony at Rio de Janeiro returned to São Vicente very ill in 1560. In Rio de Janeiro he had become sick with fever and dysentery, but he recovered in São Vicente. In the outbreak of dysentery in Piratininga in 1561, two of the Jesuit brothers also became sick with dysentery.⁵⁵

Jesuits constantly refer to “fevers” in their letters, fevers that sickened both Indians and Jesuits alike. Some of these fevers are described as acute and resulting in death; others endured for several weeks at a time. The detail in Jesuit letters makes it possible to see that all these new illnesses quickly spread within and between Indian villages. In Piratininga, for example, José de Anchieta described a girl who was sick with fever and who was brought by her parents to the Jesuits to be cured. The Jesuits tried the remedies they had, but the girl did not improve. She went to live in a nearby village with a sister, where the Jesuits visited her “many” times. When she was “out of her mind for half of a day,” the Jesuits judged her near death and moved her to Piratininga, baptized her, and watched her die two hours later. A few days later, two of her sisters became sick with the same fever, and both subsequently died.⁵⁶ Fevers also affected Jesuits, and it is certain that they affected Portuguese colonists, too. João de Azpilcueta preached his last sermon in Vila Velha (Bahia) on Maundy Thursday 1557; he immediately became sick with acute fevers that led to his death fifteen days later. Similarly, a severe fourteen-day fever led to the death of father João Gonçalves in Bahia in 1559. Other fevers were less severe but still debilitating. Brother Gregorio had “some good fevers” for three months; when he recovered, he was very thin.⁵⁷

Although Jesuits used “fever” generically, sometimes they did provide more detail in their letters, making it likely that these fevers were malaria. Explicit references to tertian and quartan (in Portuguese, *terças* and *quartãs*, respectively) fevers appear in Jesuit letters, which are clear indicators of malaria. Luís da Grã and Brás Lourenço became ill with fever at the beginning of Lent in 1555. Both were bled and recovered, but when Grã’s fever returned, he thought it would remain “*tercãas*” (*terças*), or tertian (recurring every three days). Luís de Grã later became the provincial of the Society of Jesus and lived in Bahia, where he undertook periodic visits to the aldeias. He arrived from one such visitation “very sick” with fevers from mid-December until Easter week in 1561. These

fevers were described in a letter as “*quartenaryo*” (quartãs), or quartan (recurring every four days). A Jesuit who became sick with fevers that quickly became “*cartãs*” (quartãs, or quartan) was Diogo Jácome in Espírito Santo, who died from them in April of 1565. José de Anchieta is described as sick with “*tercianas*” (terçãs, or tertian) fever in November of 1566.⁵⁸

Malaria begins with a chill, followed by headache, nausea, and vomiting. A spiking fever then develops, accompanied by profuse sweating. The attacks then recur every seventy-two hours in a quartan periodicity or every forty-eight hours in a tertian periodicity. There are four species of protozoal parasites that cause malaria, and three of them are associated with tertian or quartan malaria. Tertian malaria can be benign or malignant.⁵⁹ In the early seventeenth century, Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão refers to those who live in Brazil as suffering from tertian and quartan fevers that he calls “*maleitas*,” which modern dictionaries translate as “malaria,” from *maldita febre* (accursed fever).⁶⁰

Malaria is spread by mosquitoes; the vector is an infected female mosquito of the genus *Anopheles*, species of which were native to the Americas. Since malaria is thought not to have been present in the Americas before 1492, it had to have been introduced by infected humans. It required only that individuals suffering from malaria arrive in Brazil and that female native anopheline mosquitoes bite them and subsequently bite other individuals for the disease to emerge in Brazil. Because historians now believe that the first outbreak of malaria in the Americas occurred on the fourth voyage of Columbus, it is certainly plausible that malaria reached Brazil very early in the sixteenth century.⁶¹ Outbreaks of malaria would have followed periods of rain, when standing pools of water provided mosquitoes with breeding grounds. José de Anchieta references in passing that “fevers and other pains” are produced by the heavy and frequent rains.⁶²

Another “fever” might have been yellow fever, which is characterized by fever, headache, jaundice, and hemorrhaging into the stomach and intestines. Later, in the Caribbean, yellow fever came to be known as Black Vomit (*vomito negro*) because of the hemorrhaging of black blood. In Brazil, there is no definitive evidence of yellow fever in the sixteenth century, yet it seems probable that it must have made the transatlantic crossing. In the seventeenth century, it was also associated with worms (*doença de bicho* or *mal do bicho*), and was identified as a disease of Africa and Brazil by Aleixo de Abreu, a physician, in 1623.⁶³ Manoel da Nóbrega’s illness in 1557 is usually interpreted to have been tuberculosis, but symptoms are also suggestive of yellow fever. Nóbrega thought that

he was near death in Bahia in August of 1557 from continual fevers and vomiting blood (“deitando muito sangue pela boca”). A doctor who attended him in Salvador thought that he had a broken vein, but what Nóbrega most felt was “the fever wasting me little by little.” In the 1580s, a Jesuit report states that the fathers and brothers of the Society ordinarily “do not throw blood from the mouth” (“ni echan, de ordinario, sangre por la boca”), possibly indicating that such symptoms were seen in Brazil. The illnesses most common among the fathers and brothers, the author notes, are fevers, especially in Bahia.⁶⁴

Yellow fever is a viral hemorrhagic fever also transmitted by mosquitoes, the female *Aedes aegypti*. This species of mosquito, however, was not native to the Americas, and the mosquitoes themselves had to make the transatlantic voyage. The environment offered by ships’ water casks certainly favored mosquitoes. Outbreaks of yellow fever on board ship might last for weeks, even months at a time, which would have enabled both the mosquito and the fever to establish themselves in Brazil. Kenneth Kiple and Brian Higgins locate and date the first recorded yellow fever epidemic in the Caribbean to Barbados in 1647. At that time, the sugar boom stimulated both a denser concentration of population on Barbados and a sharp increase in the slave trade. Kiple and Higgins cite a yellow fever outbreak in Pernambuco in 1685 and attribute its origin to a slave ship from Africa. Subsequently, they claim that Brazil was free from yellow fever until the nineteenth century, when again a ship introduced the fever, this time from North America—from New Orleans or Havana. But, given the repeated contact between Brazil and Africa, it seems more likely that yellow fever reached Brazil in the sixteenth century.⁶⁵

Yellow fever and malaria are thought to have been endemic in tropical Africa in the sixteenth century, and as a result, many Africans from that region possessed acquired immunity to yellow fever and innate resistance to malaria. Many Africans who contracted yellow fever as children possessed resistance as adults. Repeated exposure to malaria can also confer immunity, and the sickle-cell trait found in people of African, Mediterranean, or southwest Asian ancestry is known to offer protection against malaria. Portuguese residents in Africa, on the other hand, who were usually adults who had not lived there as children, typically suffered from fevers that erupted after torrential rains broke the droughts. These tropical fevers did not affect Africans, nor even Afro-Portuguese, in the same ways. The fact that ships loaded with slaves sailed quickly and directly from Africa to Brazil suggests that slave ships, slaves, and the European crews

of slave ships transmitted African diseases, such as malaria and possibly yellow fever, to Brazil in the sixteenth century.⁶⁶

The Jesuit letters reveal that African slaves suffered from illnesses, some of which most certainly came from either Africa or the transatlantic passage. One of the three slaves that the Jesuits in Bahia received from São Tomé in 1552 died immediately after the Jesuits took possession of him. Nóbrega reported that the same fate befell other slaves from the same ship. "Many others died who arrived already sick from the sea voyage," he wrote to Simão Rodrigues. In another letter, Nóbrega mentioned that an André Gavião had eight African slaves in Ilhéus who were sick and depressed; these were later killed by Indians who had risen up against the Portuguese in 1559. By the 1580s, Anchieta noted that it had become the custom for the Jesuit fathers and brothers to attend to the arriving slave ships from Africa to see if there were any sick slaves who needed baptism. Two thousand slaves entered Salvador in 1581 alone, he estimated, and of these, "many" were sick and brought to shore to die.⁶⁷

According to African historian Joseph Miller, the first generation of African slaves in Brazil was a diverse population that came, primarily but not exclusively, from Central Africa. Most of the Africans had been taken from the coast south of the Kwanza River in present-day Angola. A smaller group of Africans came from the lower Congo River, in present-day Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo, and still others came from West Africa. These were agricultural peoples who lived on savannahs or in tropical forests in "small to moderate-sized village communities of kin, in-laws, clients, and others of familiar backgrounds." The areas of greater population density were located in mixed savannah and forest regions, especially along the rivers. In West-Central Africa, outbreaks of disease followed droughts, for those weakened by famine physically migrated to river valleys or to the coast. Miller hypothesizes that the slave trade "flowed in part from the tides of drought and disease that swept repeatedly through West-Central Africa" as hunger drove "starving people into the hands of slavers." Moreover, epidemics increased the supply of slaves, because slave traders in Africa sought to quickly dispose of sick slaves; but since the transporters of slaves did not bear the cost of slave mortality, the slave ships carried healthy as well as ill slaves.⁶⁸

The devastating killer smallpox is recorded very late in Brazil. Whereas smallpox decimated Arawak, Aztec, and Inca populations after its arrival in the Caribbean in 1519, there is no known record of it in Brazil until Jesuits described

it in the 1560s. Letters written in 1563 describe the illness striking in the previous year, 1562. In a long letter, Jesuit Leonardo do Vale describes a plague “so odd” and so unlike any other in Brazil. He thought it had arrived on the ship that first landed south of Salvador, in Ilhéus, but a young man from Pernambuco told Vale that the plague had come from Pernambuco, because he had been trading for slaves along the coast between Pernambuco and Bahia and had seen great mortality among the Indians. So many had died, he reported, that the living could not bury the dead. Where there had once been five hundred warriors, there were now only twenty. After this conversation, Vale thought that the plague simultaneously moved south from Pernambuco and north from Ilhéus. He describes the plague spreading into the wilderness of Ilhéus and to the Jesuit aldeias of São Miguel, Santa Cruz de Itaparica, and Nossa Senhora da Assunção. In each of these aldeias, one-third of the Indians died. He estimated that in only one of the aldeias, eighteen hundred Indians died in a two-month period. The plague then spread to Salvador, where it decimated Indian as well as African slaves. Moving still farther north toward Pernambuco, the plague first infected and killed many Indians in the mission villages of São Paulo and Santiago.⁶⁹

Another Jesuit account from Bahia notes that a pestilential fever preceded the outbreak of smallpox in Bahia and attacked the heart such that there was nothing that could be done. Smallpox, which the Jesuit named *viruelas* or *bexigas*, followed, bringing with it great horror and death. All dancing ceased, he wrote, for “everything was weeping and sadness.” The Jesuit school became a hospital where the fathers and brothers tried to nurse the sick.⁷⁰

After Anchieta returned from residing as hostage among the Tupinambá in September of 1563, he describes a fearsome plague of smallpox in São Vicente. His letter is particularly detailed and horrifying. The disease (Anchieta identifies it as smallpox, “*viruelas*”) sometimes caused benign (*dulces*) and known (*acostumbradas*) sores; from these he notes that recovery was easy. But there were other new sores that were “a horrible thing.” These sores covered the body from head to toe, he writes, similar to fatal leprosy, and resemble *cuero de cazón* (dogfish skin).⁷¹ The sores entered the mouth, covering the throat and tongue. Many died in three to four days; those who lived longer, he explains, suffered as their skin and flesh began to rot and the terrible stench attracted flies and worms. Pregnant women usually died; for those who gave birth, their babies were born with terrible deformities.⁷²

Pedro da Costa describes the arrival of smallpox, which he called “bexigas,” in Espírito Santo in early 1564. The plague began in the Aldeia Nossa Senhora da Conceição, where two Jesuits resided, and soon became widespread. All the longhouses seemed to become hospitals, he wrote, so full were they of the sick. As in Bahia and São Vicente, the epidemic was characterized by a terrible stench as the skin and muscle of the diseased began to rot and the bones began to show. Three or four died per day, and the Jesuits spent much of their time confessing, baptizing, and burying the dead. After the illness passed, the Indians chose to move the aldeia. In another aldeia, São João, of the more than four hundred that the Jesuits baptized, “a good part” died during the smallpox plague.⁷³

All routine ceased as the Jesuits ministered to the sick during the smallpox plague. Leonardo do Vale wrote that the Jesuits were exhausted from squatting for hours preparing the sick for baptism and confession. Although Vale describes the Jesuits as working day and night to bury the dead, they could not keep up, “for if twelve died, twenty fell sick.” Soon, there was no one to dig the graves, and the bodies began to be dumped in the trash heaps.⁷⁴

Twenty years later, when the Jesuits began writing their own histories of their mission in Brazil, they recognized this first smallpox plague as especially horrifying. One report cites a mortality of 30,000 Indians in two or three months.⁷⁵ A second epidemic that might have been smallpox erupted in Pernambuco in 1578–1579 and particularly affected Indian and African slaves. Beatriz Mendes described the illness, which she also called “bexigas,” as poisonous and revolting, and pointed out that it had carried away many of her own slaves.⁷⁶ Smallpox returned to Ilhéus in 1585, and a third epidemic of the disease was thought to have been brought by a French ship that had provisioned itself in Arguim before landing to collect brazilwood off the coast of Rio Grande do Norte in Brazil in 1597.⁷⁷

By the early seventeenth century, smallpox in Brazil was associated with Africa and the slave trade. Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão comments that smallpox and measles particularly attacked the Indians of Brazil. “[T]hese diseases, especially smallpox,” he writes, “are foreign diseases which generally are communicated to them [the Indians] from the Kingdom of the Congo and from Arda [West Africa] by the blacks brought from there.” The mortality of smallpox, he notes, is very high among Indians and Africans, but not among the Portuguese. He references an outbreak of smallpox the year before, 1616–1617, in which “many rich men in this State of Brazil became poor,” because so many of their slaves died. What struck Brandão as particularly odd was the way that

smallpox did not seem to have the same effect on those born in Portugal as it did on Indians, Africans, and those of Portuguese or mixed Portuguese and Indian descent born in Brazil. He observes that it is a “curious thing” that smallpox is contracted by “the heathen natives of this land and those from Guinea, and among persons who are children of white men and natives, who are called *mamelucos*, and, further, among all those born in this country, even though of white parents.” But, he continues, “those who come out from Portugal and were born there of either Portuguese or some other European parentage never catch the disease—although I have seen perhaps two or three of them die from it.”⁷⁸ Brandão observed what modern historians can explain: smallpox, endemic in Portugal, was a disease of children, who, if they recovered, harbored immunity as adults. In Brazil, the disease was epidemic, and therefore all, except adults born and raised in Portugal, were at great risk.

In January of 1582, Anchieta described a terrible epidemic in Bahia that might have been measles. In September of the previous year, a terrible epidemic broke out that Anchieta called *sarampão* (measles), which turned into *câmaras* (diarrhea). The illness was so severe that he thought it had to be a kind of plague. He estimated that this epidemic took the lives of six hundred Indians in one mission village in two days. Indian slaves on the Portuguese sugar plantations also died in such great numbers that the mills had to stop grinding cane for lack of laborers. The Jesuits suspended studies in the college of Salvador so that all priests, brothers, and students could minister to the dying. Just in the environs of the city of Salvador, Anchieta thought that more than nine thousand Indians died. An epidemic “like the measles, but as bad as the plague” hit Guanabara Bay in 1599. It erupted immediately after a ship from Spain, carrying a bishop and officials for Spanish colonies in Southeast Asia, called at Rio de Janeiro. In three months, three thousand Indians and colonists died, according to the English pirate Anthony Knivet.⁷⁹

Another possible source for disease transmission in Brazil lay with Asia. As the Jesuits made their way to India and beyond in the middle of the sixteenth century, their letters reflect contagion there, especially what they called *mordexim*, which medical scholars see as a precursor to epidemic cholera. One Jesuit in India wrote that in the winter of 1552, “an illness, which is known by its old name in this land, mordexi,” had spread in Bassein [today Vasai] “as if it were a branch of plague.” Another Jesuit described the disease, noting also that it killed men in twenty-four hours and that “many people of the land died.” There

is no evidence of mordexim in Brazil in the sixteenth century, but Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão describes dysentery similar to mordexim in the early seventeenth century. As with the disease in India, it was characterized by a twenty-four-hour diarrhea. Brandão notes that although “in India this illness, which they call *mordexim*, is fatal, here it is not, for, when the period of the accident is over, the patient gets well without any kind of medicine.”⁸⁰

After 1550, the more systematic and intense colonization of Brazil made outbreaks of disease more frequent and more severe among the Indians. Coastal Indians were no longer isolated regionally, as ships began to call more regularly along the coast. The greater movement of Portuguese colonists, the Jesuits, and Indians themselves spread disease within Brazil. Two features of Portuguese colonialism worked in tandem with disease to undermine the autonomy of traditional Indian life: slavery and the *aldeia* system. Both disrupted the traditional way of life of indigenous groups and concentrated the effects of disease.

Indian slaves lived in close proximity to Europeans and to *mamelucos* on sugar plantations, where they slept in large slave houses similar to their traditional *malocas*. On plantations, Indians from many different regions might live together, which undermined traditional family ties and contributed to the spread of disease. Additionally, slaves did not have the freedom to manage their food supply through hunting, fishing, and planting, which certainly caused a decline in overall health and nutrition. The Indian slave trade, which initially took the form of raiding or barter along the coast, also increased contact between indigenous groups and Portuguese and *mameluco* colonists.

Early Jesuit letters are full of descriptions of the “great number of ill” and the “great death” in the population of Indian slaves all along the coast of Brazil. On the Piratininga Plateau, in the village first founded by João Ramalho, the Jesuit José de Anchieta wrote that “although we help them in their illnesses, even at night in very thick forests,” nevertheless many Indian slaves from Santo André died before the Jesuits could baptize them.⁸¹ On the coast of São Vicente, Anchieta described a mission directed at slaves who lived on farms where their masters, the Jesuits continually noted, rarely attended to their spiritual needs. There are always some slaves there “sick near death,” Anchieta wrote, who needed the attention of the Jesuits. Among the Indian slaves who came from the coast of São Vicente to aid the uprising of Indians on the Piratininga Plateau, many became sick in 1561 with serious fevers. During the smallpox epidemic in Bahia, the Jesuit provincial sent three Jesuits, with an interpreter, to minister

to the slaves on several sugar plantations. The Jesuits were shocked to see the number of slaves who were sick from smallpox. In one day on one estate, they baptized seventy slaves whom they deemed near death. On their way back to Salvador, they were called to another sugar plantation, where smallpox had also spread among the slaves. The Jesuits went, but they were so exhausted that they could hardly sit on their chairs.⁸²

Many Indian slaves lived on sugar plantations, where epidemic disease spread even more rapidly than in traditional villages. On the Sergipe do Conde estate in 1572 lived just over three hundred slaves, nearly 90 percent of whom were Indian. The slaves lived in three straw houses, two of which resembled the traditional maloca. In a new straw house lived twenty African slaves, but in the two large, older straw houses (*casas de palha grandes*) lived *all* of the Indian slaves. As a slave barracks, the traditional maloca became a potential magnet for disease because Indian slaves on the plantation lived in closer contact not only to Portuguese and to Africans but also to Indians from multiple regions. That a sugar planter could be ruined by an outbreak of disease among the plantation slaves was not an idle fear. In 1581, when Anchieta described the measles epidemic, he painted a vivid picture of the colonists of Bahia crying bitterly because their mills could not grind and their fields could not be planted. On one plantation alone, the provincial judged that fifty Indians died.⁸³

Mortality was high also in the Jesuit mission villages. Following the wars against independent Indian groups in Bahia waged by Governor Mem de Sá, the Jesuits and the governor created the aldeia system, staffed by resident Jesuits, to replace the independent and autonomous Indian villages. In each aldeia resided two Jesuits. In these aldeias the Indians continued to live in large malocas.⁸⁴ Jesuit letters report numerous diseases in the aldeias, some of which may well have been introduced by the Jesuits. The Jesuits were highly mobile individuals in Brazil, and as they visited aldeias, or moved back and forth between the aldeias and the nearby Portuguese settlements and plantations, they could easily transfer disease. Much of the Jesuit mission involved close human contact, such as speaking and baptizing. Moreover, Jesuits organized large baptisms, processions, and even special religious celebrations known as jubilees in the aldeias, which were attended by Indians from other aldeias as well as by colonists. Such congregations encouraged the spread of disease.

The connection between the Jesuits' illnesses and those of mission Indians can be seen in the Jesuit letters. In 1558, father João Gonçalves went to the aldeia of

Espírito Santo in Bahia to teach Christianity and to baptize babies, who, the Jesuits recognized, ran a high risk of death. On 8 December 1558, the day of Our Lady of Conception, Gonçalves had planned a baptism of the boys he had educated in the school, as well as the baptism of babies and a special mass. In the middle of the day, he came down with a serious fever, but he continued and finished the mass with difficulty. Thirteen or fourteen days later, having been taken back to the college of Salvador, he died. Following his death, nearly all of the Jesuits in the college became sick. Back in the Espírito Santo aldeia, others who worked there became sick, and many, including the governor, thought that the place ought to be quarantined. Nóbrega disagreed. He wrote that "I trusted in Our Lord," and he resolved to send two Jesuits, each of whom had been sick with fever, to the aldeia of Espírito Santo. He justified his action, writing, "from whence the others fled in order not to become sick, I sent the sick there to be cured."⁸⁵

Soon after, the Jesuit João de Melo went to Espírito Santo and wrote that the entire time he was in the aldeia, from January to April 1560, "there were a great number of sick and many of them died." João de Melo himself became sick and could not participate in the Maundy Thursday procession on 11 April of that year; his fever was worsening so much that the vice provincial of the Jesuits ordered him back to Salvador, where he arrived in time for Easter Sunday. The plagues stunned the Indians, who had never before experienced such illness. Antônio Blázquez wrote to Rome the next year that the Indians of Espírito Santo had become so depressed from seeing so much death that they had given up singing and dancing. All that could be heard, he wrote, were cries and lamentations.⁸⁶

Jesuits who were sick, but not near death, continued to work in the mission villages. At the Bom Jesus aldeia in Bahia in 1561, Jesuit Antônio Rodrigues described how he maintained the mission despite the fact that he was sick. He wrote that there was a continual flow of ill persons brought to the church for him to baptize, as well as calls for him to personally visit the ill from house to house. The latter ministry of visiting house to house to baptize the sick had become onerous: "As you know," he wrote his fellow Jesuits in Salvador, "I am very sick and I do not have the strength that I had in times past. I sit down in a chair in the church and I have them bring the sick who can come, and I baptize them there."⁸⁷

While Jesuits on the brink of death returned from the aldeias to die, others who were less ill were often sent from the city of Salvador to the aldeias to

get well. When Brother Antônio Gonçalves arrived ill from Portugal, he was sent to one of the larger aldeias of Indians in Bahia to convalesce. In 1562, two Jesuits arrived in Brazil from Portugal. On their outbound sea voyage, many had become sick off the coast of Africa, including Brother Ciprião. Ciprião arrived in Bahia still sick, and as soon as he had recovered sufficiently, he asked for permission to visit the Indian aldeias.⁸⁸

In 1564, the Jesuits organized jubilees at the Bahian aldeias of Espírito Santo, São Paulo, and Santiago that drew many colonists from Salvador. Over very rough, muddy, and flooded roads, residents of the city arrived by foot, on horseback, in carts, or in hammocks. At the aldeias there was singing and dancing through the night, followed by confessions that began at three in the morning and continued until the mass began at dawn. The procession before the mass included delegations of children from the aldeias, Jesuit priests and brothers, other clergymen from Salvador, Indian chiefs, and at one, even the bishop of Salvador. The Jesuits recognized that these events, with their singing, chanting, processing, and dancing, made a great impression on Indians, mamelucos, and Portuguese alike. Such gatherings, however, created settings where diseases could easily spread. The bishop, who had had his hand kissed by many, found himself to be ill (*mal dispuesto*) at one, but this did not prevent him from preaching. At another, a Jesuit describes the sick who despite their illness had come to the aldeia in order to participate.⁸⁹

In many letters, the Jesuits make it clear that though they were often sick, the illnesses of the Indians did not have the same effect on them. For example, when an illness of shivers and chills killed sixty Indians in the São Paulo aldeia in Bahia during the month of June 1560, the Jesuits did not become sick, even though they spent nearly all of their time among the Indians, bleeding the sick, providing remedies such as oranges and sugar, baptizing those on the brink of death, and burying the dead, sometimes four per day. And only one Jesuit became ill during the smallpox outbreak. Gregorio Serrão, a Portuguese Jesuit who served as the translator (*língua*) in the aldeia of Itaparica, Bahia, lingered near death but recovered. In Espírito Santo, a Jesuit became sick during or soon after the smallpox plague, but from fevers that were likely malaria.⁹⁰

Jesuits saw their own illnesses as yet another burden that those dedicated to the Brazilian mission must bear. Writing about them conveyed to their readers (usually Jesuits in Portugal) the great obstacles that must be faced in Brazil. Jesuits were especially affected by fevers, diarrhea, and an illness that affected

the eyes. One of Anchieta's letters is directed to sick brothers in Portugal, and its theme is that illness perfects the virtues. In a letter to the father general of the Society in Rome, Anchieta comments that illness is just another suffering in the Jesuit mission for God. That Jesuits should not interrupt their work of teaching, baptizing, taking confession, and preaching because of their illnesses is a common theme in many Jesuit letters. The example was set by the first leaders of the Society in Brazil, Manoel da Nóbrega and Luís da Grã, both of whom were often ill, but they did not stop preaching, visiting aldeias, saying mass, and baptizing new converts.⁹¹

Many Christian Europeans in the sixteenth century believed that illnesses, particularly epidemic illnesses, were punishments from God. This view was held also in the Muslim world, where illnesses were attributed to God's will.⁹² As a result, when Europeans arrived in Brazil, divine will became a frequent explanation for the pernicious effects of disease on Indians. Villegagnon, for example, recognized the debilitating effect of disease on the Tupinambá Indians living around Guanabara Bay, and accepted it as a personal favor from God. In a prayer, which Léry purportedly heard in 1557, Villegagnon gave thanks:

And to restrain their brutal violence, Thou hast afflicted them with cruel maladies, preserving us from the same all the while; Thou hast removed from the earth those who were the most dangerous to us, and hast reduced the others to such weakness that they dare undertake nothing against us.⁹³

Jesuits, who had extensive contact with disease, perpetuated this view. They interpreted the epidemics with their high mortality as punishments from God, who was angry at the Indians for their failure to give up their old ways. When the first signs of illness struck, Jesuits used the outbreaks to reinforce their evangelical message: unless Indians fully left their ways, all-powerful God would strike them dead. As representational go-betweens, Jesuits proclaimed in sermons, speeches, and letters that terrible illnesses were sent by God.

The Jesuits described the first epidemic in Bahia in 1552 as a punishment from God directed at Indians who refused Christianity or who had left Christianity. One proud chief, who had rejected the Jesuit attempts to convert him, died four days after the Jesuits had visited his village preaching of God and death. Vicente Rodrigues noted with satisfaction that the effect on his people was "to fear us greatly, especially our Father Nóbrega." When what Jesuits called dysentery and

pleurisy reached the Portuguese settlement of Espírito Santo, Brother António de Sá likened it to the “sword of God’s anger” and believed that when the Jesuits baptized those who were near death, the “children of anger” were transformed into “children of grace” before they died.⁹⁴

Through the representation of sickness as a punishment from God, Jesuits characterized the shocking mortality in Brazil as a moral flaw of the Indians. Their deaths were unfortunate but to be expected, Jesuits reasoned, given their failure to fully embrace Christianity. Because the first smallpox plague observed by the Jesuits came at a time when the Jesuit mission was meeting roadblocks on all fronts, Jesuits even attributed it as a punishment from God. Leonardo do Vale described it as a “whipping from the Lord”—a punishment meted out against certain Indians from the aldeias who were drawn to a false prophet in the wilderness of Ilhéus who led a “*santidade*,” a millenarian messianic movement. When he learned from a trader that the smallpox plague may have in fact begun in Pernambuco, he modified his view such that God had allowed the plague to break out in two places simultaneously to better punish both the Indians in the aldeias of Ilhéus and the Caeté Indians (who lived between Bahia and Pernambuco) for their cannibalization of the first bishop of Brazil. José de Anchieta also saw the smallpox epidemic as sent from God. “Our Lord has visited and punished this land with many illnesses,” he wrote, “from which a large part of the slaves of the Christians [i.e., colonists] have died.”⁹⁵

Yet some Jesuits in the early days wondered why God punished so many young children, “who, it seems, are not at fault.” Francisco Pires explained the great mortality as God’s way of separating the good from the bad and of teaching those who wished to become Christians that they had to do more than receive baptism and wear clothes. “Our Lord wished that the children of these, who were baptized in innocence, would die in that same innocence,” he wrote, “and in this way He punished the parents and saved the souls of the children.”⁹⁶

The Jesuit mission was to convert as many Indians to Christianity as possible; it would seem, then, that epidemics posed a major threat to this mission, since Indians would die before Jesuits had time to evangelize them. But, paradoxically, imminent death presented an opportunity for Jesuit missionaries. Jesuit letters make clear that their frequent discussion of death, disease, and epidemics was partially due to the fact that those events were intimately connected with their rates of baptism. Faced with those near death, Jesuits quickly baptized them to

save their souls. Infants and young children would need little instruction and therefore could die “baptized in a state of innocence.”⁹⁷ For adults, a simple consent to be baptized on the brink of death often sufficed, even if they had had only rudimentary instruction in Christianity. By counting the number of souls saved rather than the number of living converts in their missions, Jesuits believed they were fulfilling their charge, even though their villages had fewer and fewer Christian Indians in them. In this way, Jesuits accepted—and rarely questioned—the shocking mortality of Indians. At a time when Italian towns and cities were beginning to take steps to control the spread of infectious disease, notably the plague—by forced quarantine, isolation, regulated burials, destruction of personal possessions, and provision of food to the needy—the Jesuits saw no reason to implement such measures in their aldeias. When the governor thought that the aldeia of Espírito Santo in Bahia should be quarantined, Nóbrega counseled the opposite.⁹⁸

Major changes in the Brazilian landscape visibly accelerated in the environs of Portuguese settlement from the 1550s on. The introduction of new foods, cash crops, fruits, and even weeds into the Brazilian ecosystem had profound consequences for biodiversity. The planting of sugarcane required the felling of large stands of trees that were part of the Atlantic forest. The voracious fires that boiled the cane juice in order to make sugar required cords of wood. Though it would seem that new plants would increase biodiversity, in fact the opposite was true. The introduction of non-native plant species was a major factor in the loss of biodiversity, for sugar plantations, fruit orchards, and wheat fields, even if small, competed with native plants. The introduction of ungulates—cattle, horses, sheep, and goats—degraded the original landscape.

Colonists accumulated cattle and other domestic animals on lands granted to them by Crown officials. Land grants (*sesmarias*) given to Antônio de Taíde and to Álvaro da Costa in 1552 and 1557, respectively, refer specifically to the fact that the recipients would place herds of cattle on the grasslands, which suggests that the custom of keeping cattle was now recognized and rewarded in Bahia. When the third governor of Brazil, Mem de Sá, wrote his will in 1569, he declared that he owned 500 head of cattle in Bahia, not counting the animals born that year, and 150 head on his ranch on the Joanne River, north of the city of Salvador. The inventory of his Sergipe do Conde estate in 1572 included seventeen head of sheep, thirteen oxen, and two doves, while on his Santana estate in Ilhéus, there were eight oxen and three sows. In the 1570s, Pero de Magalhães Gandavo

reported that stock raising was “general throughout all the Captaincies,” with “cows and oxen being especially abundant; and they are increasing rapidly.”⁹⁹

By 1587 cattle and horses were part of the urban landscape of Salvador. Gabriel Soares de Sousa, a Portuguese sugar planter, describes the capital city, remarking that bullfights take place in the central square and mounted equestrian festivals (*festas a cavalo*) take place in the larger square in front of the Jesuit church and school. He describes cattle corralled around the mouth of an excellent spring that gave rise to the small river that bordered the city. Their trampling, and the fact that pigs drank there too, made the water undrinkable. The richest families of Salvador own “many horses,” he writes, and estimates that five hundred mounted men can be called up if necessary.¹⁰⁰

By the time that Fernão Cardim, a Jesuit who arrived in Brazil in 1583, wrote his history of the land and climate of Brazil sometime before 1601, he could declare enthusiastically that “This Brazil is already another Portugal,” because of all the things, such as fine cloth, that come from the kingdom. These words ring true with the domestic animals that had quickly adjusted to Brazil. No longer was it just the governor, or the Jesuits, who could own large herds of cattle. There are men with “500 or 1,000 head of cattle,” Cardim explains. Although Cardim thought the pasture of Brazil poor, he notes that “there is a great quantity of cattle.” “Brazil is full of great ranches,” especially the Piratininga Plateau, which “looks like Portugal.” Pigs do very well in Brazil, and in Cardim’s opinion, give the best meat. Sheep are abundant in the south and in Rio de Janeiro. Although goats are still few, Cardim thinks that they will soon flourish. Cardim describes horses as abundant in Bahia, remarking that “handsome jennets are bred that are worth two or three hundred cruzados.” Cardim writes that chickens “are infinite and larger than in the kingdom” and dogs of many breeds have multiplied. But of all these domestic animals from Europe, Cardim observes that only chickens and dogs were adopted by Indians. He goes on to say that Indians raise chickens “three to four hundred leagues [approximately 1,850–2,500 kilometers] into the wilderness,” and that Indians value dogs because of their use in hunting. “Women carry them on their backs, and raise them as children,” he claims, even “nursing them at the breast.”¹⁰¹

The negative environmental effect of the rapid spread of European domestic animals, especially ungulates, results from a natural phenomenon known as an ungulate irruption, which occurs when hoofed animals have more food than is needed to replace themselves. Elinor Melville documents how ungulate irruptions

radically altered one region of Mexico in the sixteenth century. In such an irruption, Melville explains that the animals “increase exponentially until they overshoot the capacity of the plant communities to sustain them.” When the animals have overtaxed the carrying capacity of the land, “their populations crash” and eventually reach an accommodation with the “now-reduced subsistence base at a lower density.” The ungulate irruption is intensified by pastoralists, who deliberately concentrate more animals per unit of land. The effect on the land is severe. Melville’s detailed study of the introduction of sheep into the Valle del Mezquital in Mexico reveals that what had been an intensively irrigated and densely populated region when the Spaniards arrived became a “sparsely populated mesquite desert” one hundred years later.¹⁰²

Although the concomitant process has not been studied in Brazil, and it most certainly differed from that of Mexico, it is likely that ungulate irruptions occurred in horse, sheep, and cattle populations. Evidence of rapid increases in the size of animal herds emerges from a variety of sources. The Jesuits became interested in cattle early on, as they rarely had enough income to support themselves and their ministries. In Bahia, the Society obtained twelve cows from the king in 1552, which they intended to milk for the children they were raising in their residence. Similarly, a gift from Pero Correia, the interpreter who joined the order in 1549, included ten cows to supply milk for the children living in the Jesuit residence. Nóbrega quickly saw cattle as beneficial for the Jesuits, “because they multiply rapidly and require little work,” he wrote in 1561. The original ten cows given by Pero Correia in 1553 had grown to more than one hundred by 1563. The cattle “give meat and leather and milk and cheese, which if there are many, can support many people,” Nóbrega argued in support of the Society’s acquiring even more cattle. By 1587, Gabriel Soares de Sousa estimates that the Jesuits in Bahia had more than two thousand cows “who calve every year.”¹⁰³

Cardim notes that “there is a great abundance” of horses in Bahia; that the sheep in Rio de Janeiro became so fat that they “exploded with fat”; and that goats “are multiplying greatly and soon there will be a great multitude” of them. Pero de Magalhães Gandavo makes a revealing statement when he notes that goats and sheep “are beginning to multiply again,” which suggests that there may have been a crash in their populations. Similarly, in 1618 Brandão notes that horses “formerly abounded in countless numbers,” likewise suggesting that the population of horses in Brazil had once been large and then had crashed, as in an ungulate irruption.¹⁰⁴

The possible effects of such ungulate irruptions are visible in Soares de Sousa's descriptions of the lands surrounding Salvador. He describes the sugar plantations that dotted the Recôncavo, the hinterland along the Bay of All Saints, and evaluates the lands in terms of their suitability for sugarcane cultivation. What he called "poor" land was good "only for cattle." Similarly, in Melville's study of Mexico, land that had been degraded by the ungulate irruption was no longer suitable for agriculture and became "fit only for sheep."¹⁰⁵

In the 1580s, sparked by the visit of the Jesuit official Cristovão de Gouveia, who came with his secretary Fernão Cardim to assess the mission in Brazil, Jesuits began to write extensively about the history of their mission. One theme that emerges throughout these histories is the Jesuit awareness of tremendous decline in the Indian population. In a report authored by Fernão Cardim, he writes that there were once more than 40,000 baptized Christian Indians in Bahia, but that at the time when he was writing, there are not more than 10,000 "because they have died from many diseases." The author of a history of the Jesuit aldeias in Bahia notes that twenty years before (1563), there were fourteen aldeias with 40,000 Indians, yet in 1583, there were but three aldeias with no more than 3,500 Indians. The Indians of Bahia "are now depleted," the history states, and "no one could ever imagine that so many people would be depleted, even more so in such a short time." While the Jesuits recognized that the Indian population around Salvador and the coast had declined, they perceived that Indian population in the wilderness was still very large and that it had not suffered the same decline. Cardim states that the number of Indians was "uncountable in the interior, of many nations, customs, and languages."¹⁰⁶

This view was shared by the Portuguese colonists as well. By the 1580s, because the coastal populations of Indians had declined, Portuguese colonists financed slaving expeditions to bring Indians from the vast interior to the coastal sugar plantations. Rather than having the diseases come to them, as had happened to the first generations of coastal Indians, by the 1580s, the Indians of the interior were forced to march to the coast, where they entered a disease-ridden colony and quickly fell victim to the epidemics that continually broke out. The Indian slave trade, coupled with the onslaught of epidemics, led to what Stuart Schwartz has called a "wasted generation."¹⁰⁷

As Suzanne Austin Alchon argues, the magnitude of the demographic decline of the Native American populations resulted because of the intersection of disease with colonization. "Violence, slavery, and migration," which came with

European colonization, she writes, led to the failed recovery of indigenous American populations.¹⁰⁸ Before systematic colonization began at midcentury in Brazil, its indigenous populations undoubtedly suffered from disease, but they were able to maintain their culture and keep their social and political organization intact. Similarly, diseases undoubtedly followed trails into the wilderness and sickened peoples very distant from the Portuguese settlements, but independent and autonomous indigenous nations, described as “uncountable,” still populated the nearby wilderness in the last decades of the sixteenth century.

After midcentury, the sheer magnitude of the European and African migration to Brazil, in contrast to the tiny migration from Brazil to Europe and Africa, meant that the influence of the physical go-between redounded to the European and African side. Every European and every African who stepped ashore in Brazil, whether a penniless degradedado or a starving slave, potentially brought unknown diseases or soon worked cultivating foreign seeds or tending European and African hoofed animals or felling parts of the Atlantic forest. Often unaware of the roles they played, physical go-betweens contributed to the increasing power that the Portuguese settlements wielded in Brazil. Moreover, go-betweens carried coastal patterns of disease and ecological change deeper into Brazil. Jesuit missionary priests saw their mission as opening up “doors” into new Indian populations so that Christianity might be preached; in so doing, they not only introduced disease but paved the way for more contact between Indian and European and African peoples.

The foremost representational go-betweens of the second half of the sixteenth century, the men of the Society of Jesus, recognized and accepted the Indian population decline from disease. But the Jesuits also understood that the enslavement of Indians was part of their rapid decline. Jesuits did not question disease, for they saw it as an act of God, but they did question Indian slavery, which they saw as a sin of the colonist. Most of the Indian slaves working for Portuguese colonists had, in the eyes of the Jesuits, been obtained illegally. Jesuits, therefore, accepted the mortality of Indians from disease, but not their mortality from enslavement. The quest for Indian slaves was a crucial, driving characteristic of the Portuguese colony. How slavery became entrenched in Brazil and why the influential Society of Jesus was unable to prevent the illegal enslavement of Indians in Brazil are the subjects of the next chapter.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

6. *Slavery*

All Indians purchased today are legally acquired . . .

Pero de Magalhães Gandavo, 1574

When Pero de Magalhães Gandavo returned to Portugal from Brazil in the 1570s, he wrote two accounts about life there, becoming a new kind of representational go-between, one who reflected the perspective of Portuguese colonists. In a treatise presented to King Sebastião and Sebastião's uncle, Dom Henrique (known in English as Cardinal Prince Henry), he proclaims that as soon as a colonist arrives in Brazil, no matter how poor he may be, if he obtains slaves, "he then has the means for sustenance; because some [slaves] fish and hunt, and the others produce for him maintenance and crops; and so little by little the men become rich and live honourably in the land with more ease than in the Kingdom." In his history of Brazil, published in 1576, Gandavo adds that many colonists in Brazil own two hundred, three hundred, or even more slaves. Colonists generally "treat each other very well" and "are happy to help others with their slaves," he claims, and they "greatly favor the poor who come to settle." In Gandavo's eyes, the acquisition of slaves in Brazil brought wealth, and with it came status and honor, even for the most impecunious of Portuguese colonists.¹

Gandavo's representation of Brazil as a place where the ownership of slaves was the means for the Portuguese colonists to live honorably reveals a fundamental truth about sixteenth-century Brazil: the unquestioned acceptance of and reliance on slavery. Soon after Cabral's landing in Brazil in 1500, slavery became firmly rooted in Brazil, where it would be the foundation of Brazil's economic development for nearly four hundred years. The first slaves in Brazil, and indeed

the slaves about whom Gandavo writes in the 1570s, were not African; rather, they were Tupi, Guarani, Gê, and Arawak peoples indigenous to Brazil. Indian slaves cleared the first fields and planted them with sugarcane; Indian slaves built the first mills and produced the first sugar harvests. African slaves joined Indians on the sugar plantations in the first half of the sixteenth century, and their numbers increased rapidly after 1550. By the last three decades of the sixteenth century, African slaves began to outnumber Indian slaves on the sugar plantations of Bahia and Pernambuco. Yet neither the expansion of the slave trade with Africa nor the devastating decline in the coastal Indian population ended Indian slavery—nor did a series of laws promulgated by the king. On the contrary, Indian slavery existed alongside African slavery throughout the sixteenth century, and indeed throughout the entire colonial period of Brazilian history.

The actions of go-betweens at all levels established slavery, Indian and African, as a fundamental part of the Portuguese colonization of Brazil. Slavery is often portrayed as a dyadic relationship between two parties—the master and the slave. But third parties are inevitably part of the complex nature of slavery, and especially so as slavery becomes established and accepted as a social and economic institution. As the Portuguese developed the maritime slave trade with Africa in the fifteenth century, the roles of physical, transactional, and representational go-betweens were indispensable. Sea captains and their crews transported slaves. Translators and bilingual agents negotiated the complex exchanges that underlay a trade in slaves. But perhaps the most powerful go-betweens in the origins of slavery were those like Gandavo, who, through their writings, articulated the arguments that justified the enslavement of one group of people by another. Gandavo could unabashedly declare that owning slaves was an “honorable” occupation because he had been shaped by a tradition that represented slavery as such. Lawyers, theologians, and historians in Portugal provided the legal and moral framework for African slavery in the fifteenth century; their writings led to an almost universal acceptance of African slavery in the Portuguese world and laid the foundation for the immediate and unreflective enslavement of Tupi, Guarani, Gê, and Arawak peoples in Brazil after 1500.

The sea captains and merchants who immediately began to enslave indigenous peoples from Brazil were familiar with slavery and with maritime slave trading. They were also aware that a slave trade from Brazil might potentially be quite profitable. They believed, too, that slavery and a slave trade were

legitimate commercial practices. Such attitudes had been encouraged by an official ideology that surfaced in Portugal a half century before and that legitimized the seaborne slave trade between sub-Saharan Africa and Portugal. Constructed by representational go-betweens in the employ of the Portuguese Crown or the mercantile elite of Lisbon, this ideology drew on the arguments of classical philosophers, early Christian theologians, and traditional Iberian customs to justify the initiation and expansion of the African slave trade. These arguments used representations of Africans, of slavery, and of the Portuguese in such a way as to portray slavery as morally uplifting rather than dehumanizing. Either because the arguments were so persuasive or because dissent from them was heavily censored, there was little debate in Portugal over the morality of enslaving Africans in the fifteenth century. Similarly, no moral debate seems to have characterized the initial enslavement of Indians in Brazil, in contrast to the early Spanish experience, in which Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and other theologians vociferously challenged the enslavement of Indians.²

Although the Portuguese developed the powerful arguments that would underlie the transatlantic slave trade from Africa and that would lead to the enslavement of indigenous peoples in Brazil, they did not need to legitimize the existence of slavery, nor even the idea of a slave trade by sea. Both slavery and a slave trade were already well established in the Mediterranean world. Although slavery had disappeared from much of Western Europe by the fifteenth century, that was not the case on the Iberian Peninsula. In Iberian kingdoms, such as Portugal, Castile, or Aragon, slaves worked as domestics, in artisanal trades, or as heavy laborers. The Spanish law code of the thirteenth century, known as the *Siete Partidas*, clearly spelled out the status of slaves and the power of masters.³ For the Portuguese, as well as for other Iberians, there was nothing unusual about the existence of slavery, nor was there the need to comment on its morality. The arguments of classical philosophers and early Christian theologians carried great weight, and they had already discussed slavery in detail.

Aristotle and early Christian theologians such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas had established that slavery was a “natural” state, acceptable to God. From Aristotle arose the conviction that natural law sets aside part of mankind to be slaves. In *The Politics*, book one, chapters 4 and 5, Aristotle argues that “a slave is a living possession,” and “the slave is not only the slave of his master, but wholly belongs to him.” He poses the question: “Is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right,

or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature?" And he answers clearly: "That some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule."⁴ In the early Christian era, Augustine connected slavery with sin. He writes, "We believe that it is with justice that a condition of servitude is imposed on the sinner," and "[t]he first cause of servitude, therefore, is sin." Slavery, in Augustine's eyes, is "a condition which can come about only by the Judgment of God, in Whom there is no injustice, and Who knows how to distribute different punishments according to the merits of the offenders."⁵ Aquinas accepted Aristotle's notion of natural slavery and explored some of the complexities of slavery in the middle ages. He discussed whether slaves might marry, whether slavery was inherited from the mother or father, and whether slaves were entitled to justice.⁶

The Portuguese did not need to justify the slave trade, even by sea, for they were not the first maritime slave traders. The Canary Island archipelago, known during Greco-Roman times as the Fortunate Islands, was rediscovered by seafaring Western Europeans in the fourteenth century. Claimed in the fifteenth century by the Kingdom of Castile, the islands became a destination for Italian and Iberian merchants who mounted slaving expeditions aimed at the indigenous peoples, known as the Guanche. In addition to this Atlantic trade, Genoese merchants participated in a slave trade in the eastern Mediterranean, using their ships to carry peoples from the Black Sea hinterland—often Eastern Orthodox Christians—to Mediterranean ports. The Genoese, as well as other Italian and Iberian merchants, also purchased slaves from port cities of North Africa and resold them in other Mediterranean markets. These slaves came from sub-Saharan Africa via the overland trans-Saharan trade. "Captives," who frequently became slaves, were also a common form of booty trafficked by Mediterranean pirates. Christian as well as Muslim pirate-merchants were guilty of attacking coastal settlements and kidnapping unsuspecting residents, who, if not exchanged for a ransom, were sold as slaves in Mediterranean ports.⁷

But Portuguese merchants were the first Europeans to systematically export slaves by sea from Africa. Arguim (1448), in present-day Mauritania, was the first Portuguese *feitoria* in Africa, and by the 1450s, a regular commerce in slaves had begun there.⁸ Several decades later, the Portuguese king ordered a *feitoria* to be built farther south, at Mina, the "mine" where for a decade the Portuguese had traded for gold. The building of the trading post was carefully planned.

The captain charged with this undertaking left Lisbon not only with detailed instructions from the king but with much of the hardware, timbers, gates, tiles, bricks, and even pre-cut stones for the fortress. He had with him five hundred soldiers, should it become necessary to resort to force to carry out his mission. The Portuguese captain negotiated with the African chief Caramansa, and through interpreters gained his support, albeit begrudgingly, for the fort.⁹ Thus began in 1482 the infamous *feitoria* of São Jorge da Mina, which would later become one of the most prominent ports in the transatlantic slave trade.

Even though there had been a long-standing tradition of slavery in the Mediterranean, the advent of this Portuguese slave trade from Africa was something quite new. This trade took into captivity peoples who did not threaten the Portuguese militarily and who often willingly accepted Christianity. Moreover, the trade was not undertaken by pirates, but was fully licensed and encouraged by Prince Henry the Navigator, who prided himself on being a devout Christian. Not only was Prince Henry a major investor in the slave trade, but the Portuguese Crown continued to benefit from it after his death. The reputation of the Portuguese Crown thus required that the enslavement of Africans in this new commercial venture be seen within Christendom as legal, moral, and just. Therefore, Portuguese kings and princes took pains to obtain from the ruling popes the rights to engage in the new slave trade and to insist on the legal status of African slaves.

Not surprisingly, the task of constructing coherent arguments on the legality of African slavery fell on the shoulders of lawyers, theologians, and historians, often those who sought and received the favor of the Portuguese Crown.¹⁰ Their arguments reflected the specific historical traditions and customs of Iberia, especially the legacy of *convivencia*, or “co-existence,” of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and the centuries-long Reconquista of Muslim Iberia by Christian kingdoms. Most importantly, the arguments carried the seal of the papacy, expressed in a series of papal bulls that granted the Portuguese Crown permission to enslave Africans.

Gomes Eanes de Zurara, a royal chronicler and an aide to Prince Henry the Navigator, is the most well known of these writers. In his chronicle of Guinea, Zurara describes the early Portuguese slave raids in West Africa and the subsequent auctioning of West African slaves in Portugal. In telling this story, Zurara defines the arguments that justified the enslavement of Africans between 1434 and 1447. According to Peter Russell, a modern biographer of Prince Henry,

Zurara was “no mere palace clerk but a person of consequence at court, a protégé of princes who were very much aware that it lay in the hands of the chroniclers such as he to determine if and how posterity would remember them.”¹¹

The first references to slaves in Zurara’s chronicle are not to sub-Saharan slaves, but to slaves brought from the Canary Islands by Gil Eanes in 1433. Zurara spends little time in his narrative discussing these slaves, for they were part of an established slave trade that supplied the already extant custom of Iberian slavery. The second set of references in Zurara’s chronicle is to captives and appears during his discussions of the sailors who successfully sailed past the Cape of Bojador and who were entreated by Prince Henry to capture one or two local inhabitants to serve as future translators. In describing the failure of one captain to successfully capture a youth, Zurara writes that the captain, Afonso Gonçalves, was not content “because he had not captured one of those Moors.”¹²

By defining those who were to be captured as Moors—that is, Muslims from North Africa—Zurara has little need to justify their enslavement. Hostility between Christians and Muslims in Iberia was long-standing and often led to enslavement through piracy, raids, or outright war. The practice of freeing those so captured was known as *resgate* (ransoming). Following battles in the Reconquista, Iberian families from the Christian kingdoms offered ransom for their captive kin through a bilingual intermediary, known as an *exea* (from the Arabic *shī’a*, or “guide”) or an *alfaqueeque* (from the Arabic *al-fakkāk*, or “redeemer”), a classic example of a transactional go-between.¹³ Capturing a Moor and holding him as a captive who could be ransomed later was not an act that required justification to Iberian Christians.

Zurara does provide justifications for enslavement when the Portuguese moved beyond capturing individual Moors, who might easily be ransomed by their families. After describing the capture of a group of men and women in an out-and-out raid, Zurara reminds his readers that Prince Henry’s most important motivation for undertaking the exploration of the coast of Africa was to bring Christianity to the lost souls of Africa. Zurara describes how Prince Henry sent an ambassador to the Vatican to ask for indulgences for those engaged in crusades under Prince Henry’s leadership. Zurara includes a Portuguese transcription of part of this papal bull (*Illius qui se pro divini*, of Eugenius IV, 1442) to underscore the great work of Prince Henry as a leader against the Moors, the

enemies of Christ. Although this bull says nothing about Africa, or indeed slave raiding there, its placement in the text clearly conveys to the reader that the pope recognized the right of Prince Henry to extend the crusade against the Moors to Africa. The next year, in 1443, when Prince Henry received the monopoly over the African trade south of the Cape of Bojador from the regent of Portugal, documents submitted by Prince Henry clarified that two voyages had brought back a total of thirty-eight Moors from Africa as captives.¹⁴

As Zurara builds up to his most famous passage in his chronicle, which concerns the first landing of a significant cargo of sub-Saharan Africans in southern Portugal, he references a biblical story that justifies the slave status of Black Africans. One of the Moors whom the Portuguese had captured was a free man of status among his own people in Africa, and he sought to ransom for his freedom. He proposed to exchange five or six slaves in his homeland for his own freedom. Zurara writes of these slaves whom the Moor proposed to exchange, "These blacks (*negros*), even though they are Moors as the others, are nevertheless slaves (*servos*) of them by the ancient custom which I believe is because of the curse that after the flood Noah threw on his son Cain."¹⁵

With these words, Zurara references what was to become one of the most powerful justifications for the enslavement of Black Africans: the so-called Curse of Ham. "This biblical story," writes David Goldenberg, "has been the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years."¹⁶ The text in Genesis first explains that "the sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled." But when Noah, the first farmer, drank too much wine from his vineyard and fell asleep drunk, the text from Genesis relates that Ham "saw the nakedness of his father," and "told his two brothers." When Noah woke up from his sleep and learned what his youngest son had done, the biblical text preserves his response verbatim: "'Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers'" (Gen. 9:18–25, RSV).

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars through the ages pondered the meaning of the story. According to Goldenberg, Ham was taken to mean "dark" or "hot"—as in living in the hot country—by generations of textual scholars, but this is a misreading of the original Hebrew. He argues, on the contrary, that "[t]he name Ham is not related to the Hebrew or to any Semitic word meaning 'dark,' 'black,' or 'heat,' or to the Egyptian word meaning 'Egypt.'"

Goldenberg's thesis is that Ham did not represent the father of Black Africa to the early Hebrews and that "there is no indication from the biblical story that God intended to condemn black-skinned people to eternal slavery."¹⁷

Goldenberg further argues that the "Curse of Ham" is a misnomer. Although many interpret the passage to mean that Noah cursed and condemned Ham, the biblical text actually says that Noah cursed Canaan, Ham's son. Why Canaan should receive the curse for his father's sin sets the stage for the extension of the curse to all of Ham's descendants. Zurara states that he believes the curse falls on "Caym," which is certainly Cain, and not Cão (Ham) or Canaã (Canaan), as the biblical text reads. Cain was also cursed, and according to interpretations of the curse dating back to the sixteenth century, the mark of the curse made him black, too.¹⁸

Coupled with these two misreadings—equating Ham with black and condemning Ham not Canaan—Goldenberg argues, was the increasing identification of Black Africans with slavery. It was the growing presence of Black African slaves, he suggests, that led to the "introduction of blackness" into the biblical story. Gradually, the curse of Noah came to be understood as a curse of blackness and slavery in seventh-century Islamic texts, which coincided with the increasing numbers of Black African slaves in the Middle East as a result of Muslim conquests in Africa. "From this time onward," Goldenberg writes in his conclusion, "the Curse of Ham, that is, the exegetical tie between blackness and servitude, is commonly found in works composed in the Near East, whether in Arabic by Muslims or in Syriac by Christians. The increasing reliance on the Curse coincides with the increasing numbers of Blacks taken as slaves."¹⁹

Zurara's use of the Curse of Ham provides his Portuguese readers with a powerful interpretation of a sacred text that implied that slavery and blackness were entwined. Black Africans were already slaves to the Moors, Zurara explains, and were so because of a biblical curse. While Zurara cites as his reference Archbishop Dom Rodrigo de Toledo, other scholars suggest that his use of the story was also influenced by "the attitudes of his native Muslim informants."²⁰

Zurara, like other Iberian Christians, came of age in a southern Mediterranean world influenced by Islamic law, culture, and commerce. Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together in an uneasy coexistence in late-medieval Iberia, and, as a result, Iberian Christians had more contact with Islamic philosophy and cultural traditions than did Christians in Western Europe. Islamic teachings clearly specified that only infidels might be enslaved, with the hope that slaves would

gradually convert to Islam. This Muslim attitude toward slavery would greatly influence the attitudes of Christians in Iberia and later in Western Europe, as Christians came to adopt the view that “infidels,” not fellow Christians, should be enslaved. Christian and Jewish Iberians living under Muslim rule, as well as Christians and Jews living in the Christian kingdoms that bordered the Muslim kingdoms, were exposed not only to Muslim attitudes toward slavery but to the ambiguous position of Black Africans in the Islamic world. While all races were welcomed into the Islamic faith, and though slavery was never the predominant labor system in Muslim society, nevertheless, a slave trade had existed from sub-Saharan Africa to Egypt and the Middle East since well before the rise of Islam. Africans had, for example, labored as slaves under the Greeks and Romans. But the numbers of African slaves in the Middle East increased with the Islamic conquests of North Africa and the subsequent expansion of the trans-Saharan trade. Over time, sub-Saharan Africa became an important source of slaves for the Middle East. The enslavement of West Africans served to demean the social position of Black Africans, even when Black Africans converted to Islam. By the eleventh century, most slaves in the Muslim world originated from sub-Saharan Africa. Racial stereotyping in the Muslim world denigrated Blacks, and blackness came to be equated with slavery. As in the Muslim world, the Curse of Ham would be used to justify the enslavement of Black Africans at the very time when African slavery began to expand into Portugal.²¹

In a famous chapter, Zurara recounts the arrival of an expedition led by Lançarote de Freitas (or Lançarote da Ilha) in 1444. Zurara represents these events so as to persuade the reader that slavery is bittersweet but nevertheless just. Lançarote, the royal tax collector of the southern Portuguese port of Lagos and a man close to Prince Henry, had returned from West Africa with a significant cargo of slaves. Early on the morning of 8 August, Zurara writes, sailors began to unload more than two hundred slaves from six ships in the port of Lagos. Zurara describes the slaves as ranging from “reasonably white, attractive and of good appearance” to “as black as Ethiopians and so disfigured.” He asks his reader a rhetorical question: “What heart could be so hard as not to be pierced with piteous feeling to see that company?” before describing how the slaves were divided up randomly into five lots, “children separated from fathers; and women from their husbands; and brothers and sisters from each other.”²²

Zurara’s detailed re-creation of the scene suggests that it was not an ordinary sight. The division of the slaves took place outside the town gate in a field that

was filled with townspeople and people from nearby villages who had come to celebrate the safe return of the ships. Even Prince Henry was there, watching the spectacle mounted on a horse, and bestowing favors and gifts; he was to receive one-fifth of the slaves. But according to Zurara, it was not a happy scene. As the Africans were divided up into lots, many cried, groaned, beat their faces with their hands, and threw themselves on the ground. Others sang lamentations, and though none of the Portuguese could understand the words, Zurara believed that no one could miss the deep sadness expressed. Women who refused to give up their children were beaten. The Portuguese common people who saw this apparently were shocked and revolted at the sight. Zurara, describing the townspeople and villagers who had given up their work for that day to see "this new thing," recounts, "And with these things that they saw, some crying and others being separated, they made a great disturbance which interrupted the officials of that division."²³

Some historians see Zurara's portrayal of this auction as an important statement, arguing that it reflects that the slave trade with Africa was not initially accepted in Portugal. Russell disagrees, believing rather that there was nothing unusual about the auctioning of slaves in Lagos. Russell suggests instead that Zurara describes a special occasion that was "intended to celebrate the fact that Portugal had now joined the Genoese, the Catalans and Valencians as a serious slave-trading nation." Prince Henry's presence there, he maintains, was intended to underscore the importance of this event and to silence his critics. Russell writes that the prince sought to let the crowds at Lagos "see for themselves that, contrary to what his many critics had been suggesting, the exploration of Guinea was not the risky and useless waste of effort and money they complained about."²⁴

Russell cites a similar scene described by Zurara the next year when ships returned loaded with slaves, this time to Lisbon, to underscore his argument that Zurara had no intention of raising moral objections to the slave trade. Zurara describes the scene in the Lisbon harbor as the ships anchored and crowds gathered to see what their cargo was. "Who would be he who would not take pleasure to see the multitude of people who ran to see those caravels?" Zurara asks. The next day an equally large crowd lined the streets along which the slaves were marched and noisily praised the wisdom of Prince Henry, silencing all critics. In Zurara's words: "The shouts of the crowd praising the great virtues of the Prince [Henry] were so loud when they saw those bound captives being taken

along those streets that if anyone wished to dare say the contrary, he would have to retract it immediately.”²⁵

Zurara's description of the slave auction in Lagos does suggest that village peasants and ordinary townspeople, who were unlikely to benefit from the slave trade, initially found the slave trade from Africa repulsive. But his description of a similar arrival in Lisbon, a city of merchants, clearly conveys the recognition by its more mercantile populace of the financial profits to be realized from the trade. Zurara expresses the view that the plight of the slaves was to be pitied and lamented, but those lamentations were tempered by his certainty that blackness “equaled ugliness and servility” and that through slavery the Africans would become Christians, bringing their souls salvation.²⁶

The spiritual benefit to be gained by slaves is one of Zurara's most important justifications for the slave trade. At the arrival of the slave ships in Lagos, Zurara portrays Prince Henry as disinterested in his material profit (which came to forty-six slaves) but taking pleasure instead in the “salvation of the souls that before were lost.” Zurara claims that many years later he saw with his own eyes, in the town of Lagos, children and grandchildren of these very slaves who were “such good and such true Christians.” Yet, as his description of the arrival of slaves in Lisbon reveals, material rewards were handsome for merchants and investors. Zurara has no reservations about this fact. He tells his readers that Prince Henry was not present in Lisbon when the slaves arrived, but he nevertheless sent for his fifth of the slaves. The rest of the slaves were sold in the city, “from which all generally received great benefit and gain.”²⁷

Zurara recognizes the financial success of the slave trade, but he is also careful to emphasize that the slave trade was moral, acceptable, and even honorable. He employs the arguments that would uphold the slave trade for centuries: Black slaves from Africa were “disfigured” and already slaves because they had been cursed to servitude by Noah; moreover, slavery would bring Christianity, and ultimately salvation, to heathen Africans. Thus, following Zurara's logic, slavery was a noble, honorable cause. The pain felt by slaves would be more than compensated by their spiritual gain.

The theory of the just war also served as a powerful religious justification for the Portuguese enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans and later of the indigenous peoples of Brazil. Classical philosophers and early Christian theologians had debated the morality of waging war. Augustine argued that war, although abhorrent, was permitted when undertaken by proper authorities for a just

cause, such as to establish peace and order. Thomas Aquinas established three conditions for war to be just and therefore not a sin. First, he argued that “the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged” must be obtained. Second, “that those who are attacked should be attacked because they deserve it.” And third, “the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good.” From such ideas developed the legality of waging a just war.²⁸

The kings of the Christian kingdoms of Iberia never doubted that the Reconquest fit the rules developed by Augustine and Aquinas for a just war. As the crusading monarchs of Iberia began to assert their right to extend the Reconquest to North Africa, the concept of the just war began to coincide with the enslavement of Africans. The raids, attacks, and pitched battles of the Reconquest in Iberia had always created prisoners of war or captives, who were held by both sides. These captives lost their freedom and became slaves unless they were ransomed by their families or religious leaders. After the Portuguese attacks on Muslim cities such as Ceuta in 1415, Tangier in 1437, and Alcácer-Ceguer in 1458, prisoners of war taken by the Portuguese in North Africa became slaves. After the assault on Ceuta, the Portuguese king sought a declaration from the pope declaring that it had been a crusade, thereby laying to rest any question of the justness of the war and entitling the soldiers to special indulgences. Once the declaration of a just war had been made, it legitimized not only the violence but also the enslavement of the prisoners of war. In 1441, after the Portuguese attacked Mauritania, the Crown again sought and received (*ex post facto*) papal confirmation that the war was just. In 1442, Prince Henry requested and received a papal bull that declared the raids along the coast of West Africa a crusade. Ten years later, the famous papal bull “*Dum diversas*” granted the Portuguese the right to enslave all “pagans and enemies of Christ.”²⁹

Warfare and slave raiding were not practical means to obtain slaves over the long run, however, and sea captains sought to trade, rather than to fight, for slaves. Trading for slaves replaced overt slave raiding along the coast of Africa in the 1450s. But a peaceful slave trade required a new justification for enslavement, as sea captains were no longer obtaining their captives through wars claimed to be just. In another famous bull, “*Romanus pontifex*,” Pope Nicholas V ruled in 1455 that the slave trade was permitted because good came from it, and he gave the Portuguese the monopoly over the slave trade in West Africa henceforth. This idea that slavery enabled Christian evangelism appeared in official

documents as an unquestioned assumption. For example, when Prince Henry rewarded the Order of Christ with certain rights, the official document states that along the Guinea coast, “as in the beginning through war as later through trade and ransoming, a great number of captives has come to Christianity.” The idea that slavery and evangelism could work together became another fundamental justification for the slave trade in the sixteenth century when a law requiring the baptism of African slaves was included in the compilation of laws by King Manuel in 1514.³⁰

While the early slave raiding along the coast of Africa depended on physical go-betweens who sailed the ships, charted the waters, and violently captured the first slaves, once trade replaced raiding, transactional go-betweens—some of whom were themselves slaves—became essential. Often seized by force, these interpreters paved the way for a commercial slave trade by making contact with local groups, negotiating with chiefs, and clarifying the terms of trade.³¹ Later, resident middlemen became the crucial transactional go-betweens in the slave trade with Africa. In traditional African societies, enslavement occurred as punishment for indebtedness or crimes, or as the result of wars; these slaves could then be traded. The African kings controlled this intertribal slave trade, as they did the early trade with the Portuguese. But the slave trade with Portuguese merchants required an intermediary who acquired slaves from African kings and transferred them to European sea captains. By the sixteenth century, *lançados* were established in upper Guinea and were accumulating slaves—those deemed “criminals” in traditional African societies, those captured in war, and those overtly stolen in slave raids. *Lançados* assembled slaves to await ships from Portugal, and they sold goods brought by Portuguese ships to Africans.³²

Similar patterns soon emerged when Benin, Kongo, and Angola became sources of slaves for the Portuguese trade. *Falantes* (speakers; interpreters) were important in the Benin slave trade, whereas *pombeiro* was the name given to the “middleman,” often mulatto, who supplied merchants with slaves from the interior of the Kongo and Angola. The *falantes* and *pombeiros* spoke African languages and were acculturated in African ways. The *pombeiros* in Angola often came from São Tomé, were themselves of Kongoese ancestry, and used their knowledge of Kongo customs and language in the slave trade.³³

The slave trade brought increasing numbers of West Africans not only to Portugal but also to Western Europe. In the early sixteenth century, the German painter Albrecht Dürer drew two portraits of West Africans. One is



Figure 6.1. Albrecht Dürer's *Portrait of a Black Man*, 1508. Albertina, Wien.

a charcoal sketch of an African man (Fig. 6.1), which bears a date of 1508 but may have been drawn earlier, when Dürer was in Venice (1505–1506). He also drew a silverpoint portrait of an African woman in Antwerp in 1520–1521. Antwerp was then a very cosmopolitan city filled with Portuguese merchants. Katherina (Fig. 6.2) was a slave or servant of his friend, the Portuguese factor João Brandão.³⁴

By the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese were not the only Europeans engaged in the slave trade with West Africa. Genoese, Florentine, and Castilian merchants challenged Portuguese merchants there, but the Portuguese dominated

the trade.³⁵ Moreover, the Portuguese Crown became deeply involved. According to the careful recalculation of the rates of the Portuguese slave trade in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century by economic historian Ivana Elbl, the Crown's share of the slave trade was at minimum an average of one thousand slaves per year, and the private slave trade, whether by Portuguese merchants, Cape Verde Islanders, or the São Tomean and Príncipe traders, was on average nearly two thousand slaves per year.³⁶ The Portuguese Crown, which claimed one-third of the total trade, considered the trade legal, moral, and lucrative.



Figure 6.2. Albrecht Dürer's *Portrait of Katherina*, 1521. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi; Fratelli Alinari.

There were voices raised in opposition to the slave trade, but few were heard. One of the most persuasive was that of Fernando Oliveira, a Portuguese clergyman, military theorist, and pilot.³⁷ Oliveira wrote several major works on Portuguese shipbuilding, but his *Arte da guerra do mar* (1555) explicitly addresses the moral and practical issues that arose when the Portuguese engaged in war at sea. As a former member of the Dominican order, Oliveira was educated, but he deliberately wrote in “short and clear” Portuguese so that “men of war,” who rarely read Latin, could benefit. Oliveira immediately tackles the nature of war and the just war. In Chapter 4, titled “What Is a Just War?” Oliveira begins with a statement that Christians may not wage war unless it is just, and a just war punishes those who have offended God—blasphemers, heretics, apostates, and former Christians. “We may not wage just war against the infidels who never were Christians,” Oliveira states, “such as Moors and Jews and Gentiles who with us wish to have peace, and who do not take our lands nor by any means threaten Christendom.” Then, he proclaims: “To seize lands . . . to capture the peoples of those lands who have not blasphemed Jesus Christ, nor have resisted the preaching of His faith . . . is manifest tyranny.” Moreover, Oliveira argues, it is not acceptable for Christians to excuse themselves on the grounds that slavery is a custom among the peoples whom they capture, “because if there were not buyers there would not be evil sellers, nor would thieves steal in order to sell.” Oliveira clearly believed that most of the captives acquired by traders had been forced into slavery in response to the demand created by slave traders. He writes, “we give them the opportunity to deceive themselves, to rob each other, and to enslave and to sell.” In his most famous words, Oliveira declares: “We were the inventors of such an evil trade, never before used or heard of among humans.” Oliveira does not explicitly identify the slave trade he denounces, but scholars have little doubt that he is directly addressing the Portuguese slave trade in West Africa.³⁸

Oliveira completely dismisses the argument, advanced by apologists for the slave trade, that slavery facilitated conversion to Christianity. He asserts instead that those who went to Africa for slaves did so for their own material interest, not to save the souls of slaves—“because if their material interest were removed, they would not go there.” Moreover, those who owned slaves rarely taught their slaves “how to know or to serve God,” nor did they even allow them to hear mass, or permit them to observe Sundays or holy days. Oliveira concludes that “[t]heir captivity is more attributed to the service of their masters than to the service of God.”³⁹

Oliveira's book received little recognition in Lisbon, and Oliveira found himself imprisoned by the Inquisition soon after the book's publication. Other Portuguese as well as Spanish theologians also questioned the slave trade with Africa, but their works did not have much effect either.⁴⁰ Bartolomé de Las Casas, who had considerably more success with the Spanish Crown in his campaign against Indian slavery in the Spanish colonies in the sixteenth century, perceptively notes the power of the historians of the Portuguese court. In his *Historia de las Indias*, Las Casas reviews events along the coast of West Africa, borrowing liberally from Zurara. From time to time, Las Casas reflects on the Portuguese role in the enslavement of Africans and criticizes the representations made by Portuguese historians. After paraphrasing Zurara's account of the first captures of Africans, he writes, "How much the Portuguese historians extol as illustrious these, such evil, deeds, offering them all as great sacrifices to God." And, later, after recounting Zurara's description of the first slave auction in Lagos, Las Casas chides Zurara for not seeing that the good intentions of Prince Henry (to Christianize the slaves) did not excuse the violence, the deaths, the captivity, and the great injustice done to those brought from Africa.⁴¹

The well-developed justification for slavery and the increasing numbers of slaves trafficked between African ports and Portugal in the fifteenth century explain the immediate, unreflective adoption of slave trading in Brazil. So comfortable were mariners of the early sixteenth century with the slave trade that they immediately saw it as a possible commercial venture in Brazil. When the Society of Jesus arrived in Brazil in 1549, however, questions began to be raised about the legality of enslaving the Indians of Brazil. Although the Jesuits wanted to enlist the support of the Portuguese colonists in their mission to evangelize the Brazilian Indians, a bitter conflict with the colonists over Indian slavery soon ensued.⁴²

References to a slave trade from Brazil appear in documents from the first years of contact. When the Portuguese Crown granted to Fernando de Noronha the right to exploit the brazilwood trade in 1502, the contract contained a proviso that allowed him to trade for slaves. The captain's instructions for the *Bretoa* (which partially belonged to Fernando de Noronha) directed that slaves could not be brought back except if ordered by the outfitters (*armadores*) of the ship. Thirty-six Indian slaves were taken to Portugal on the *Bretoa* in 1511. In 1515, a Portuguese ship returned to Portugal loaded not only with brazilwood but with slaves. These slaves, according to a pamphlet publicizing the voyage, cost

virtually nothing because parents freely gave their children to the slave traders, thinking “that their children are going to the Promised Land.” When Magellan arrived along the coast of Brazil in late 1519 and early 1520, he prohibited his men, on penalty of death, to trade for slaves. His rationale was in no way a moral statement; it was simply to avoid conflict with the Portuguese and to prevent the addition of more mouths to feed aboard ship.⁴³

The Indian slave trade in southern Brazil appears to have been established by the 1520s, when a Portuguese *degradado* known as “the bachelor” of Cananéia was supplying slaves to Spanish and other European sea captains. In northern Brazil, when King João III drew up the charter that granted Pernambuco to Duarte Coelho in 1534, he permitted Coelho to export, free from the usual duties, 24 slaves annually to Lisbon. Beyond these 24 slaves, Coelho was free to send more slaves, provided the duties were paid. Moreover, the king indicated that the sailors and crew were also permitted to bring Indian slaves from Brazil. Virtually nothing is known about these Indian slaves who were sold in Lisbon in the first decades of the sixteenth century, but they were certainly outnumbered by West African slaves. Elbl estimates the annual trade in slaves from West Africa at 2,650 slaves in 1500–1509; that number rose to 3,500 slaves annually in 1510–1515, and to 4,500 slaves annually in 1516–1521. It is likely that the mortality of the far fewer numbers of Brazilian Indian slaves in Portugal was high, given their lack of immunity to European and African diseases. One hundred years later, Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão thought it remarkable enough to comment on the high mortality of Brazilian natives in Portugal. He states, “I have seen some of the native heathen of this land taken to our Portugal, where they do poorly and most of them die very soon.”⁴⁴

Demand for slaves soon intensified when the first *donatários* began to build their colonies in Brazil. In 1548, 3,000 slaves labored in the captaincy of São Vicente, which then had six hundred colonists and six sugar mills. One of the sugar mills in São Vicente, probably the largest and best appointed, had 130 slaves, the vast majority of whom were Indian, for only 7 or 8 were from Africa. The African slaves held the highly skilled jobs, including the crucial role of sugar master. In 1542, the *donatário* of Pernambuco asked the king for “a few slaves from Guinea”; in 1545, the *donatário* of Paraíba do Sul wrote his business partner that he had sufficient slaves to work some of his mills, but he wanted to import 60 slaves from Guinea for new mills he was building upstream. When Hans Staden arrived in Pernambuco in 1548, he estimated that 30 “Moors

[African] and Brazilian [Indian] slaves” lived at Iguarassú, a sugar mill outside the main settlement at Olinda.⁴⁵

The first Africans to set foot in Brazil were on the very first expeditions to Brazil: an African interpreter was with Cabral in 1500, and an African slave was present for Magellan’s sojourn in 1519–1520. Although it is impossible to date when the first African slaves arrived to stay in Brazil, it is likely that they came in the 1530s. In the earliest settlements, highly skilled African slaves were purchased because of their familiarity with sugar production. African slavery was certainly established in Brazil when the first governor, Tomé de Sousa, landed in 1549 with slaves provided by the king himself.⁴⁶

After the Jesuits arrived in 1549, they immediately perceived that slavery was the preferred labor system used by the colonists in Brazil. “Men who come here,” Nóbrega observed, “find no other way of living except to live from the labor of slaves.” When the Jesuits first visited Pernambuco, they found a substantial African slave population working and living alongside Indian slaves. In 1552, a Jesuit indicated that Pernambuco had such a large population of Indian and African slaves that every Sunday during Lent of that year one thousand slaves, both men and women, joined in an orderly procession. Even more slaves lived on plantations. So commonplace was Indian slavery in Brazil that the Jesuits immediately dedicated part of their mission to Indian slaves. The slaves were so responsive to the Jesuit preaching, Jesuit Francisco Pires notes, that “they know the catechism better than their masters.” Even Hans Staden, who found himself destitute in São Vicente after having been shipwrecked, was able to acquire a Guarani slave who helped him to hunt. By 1556, the town council of Salvador wanted permission from the Crown to institute a slave trade between Brazil and Africa; they proposed to exchange Indian slaves from Brazil for African slaves from São Tomé.⁴⁷

Some of the slaves in Brazil came from the Spanish territories farther south, from the Río de la Plata and Paraguay. There Spanish conquistadors enslaved thousands of Guarani in their expeditions of exploration and conquest. Spanish captains used Indian guides and interpreters to lead them to neighboring villages and settlements, but if the Indians resisted, they were attacked and enslaved. The German Ulrich Schmidel, who arrived in the Río de la Plata with Pedro de Mendoza in 1536 and remained in Paraguay until 1553, frequently comments on the enslavement of Indians. On one occasion, a Spanish captain ordered the Spaniards to kill all the Cario [Guarani] men (who had formerly been their

allies) but to enslave the women and children. On another occasion, their captain, Cabeza de Vaca, ordered the men to attack, kill, and enslave their hosts, the Surucusi; according to Schmidel, two thousand men, women, and children were enslaved. After one expedition, Schmidel writes that the Spaniards "won nearly 12,000 persons, between men, women, and children, who must become our slaves"; his own share amounted to fifty slaves. Because of the proximity of Paraguay to São Vicente, Guarani slaves made their way into the Portuguese colony. According to Antônio Rodrigues, a Spaniard who had accompanied the armada of Pedro de Mendoza to Río de la Plata and who later entered the Society of Jesus in São Vicente, Spanish slave traders sold Guarani Indians in São Vicente, as well as in Peru.⁴⁸

Other Indian slaves came from overt slave raiding along the coast of Brazil, a practice not unlike some of the first slave raids along the coast of Africa. Unscrupulous Portuguese slave traders used deception and trickery to capture Indians, whom they sold as slaves to colonists. Slave raiders approached the Indians peacefully, then filled their ships with captives and set sail. Although these raids produced slaves for colonists, they were deeply destabilizing and threatened Indian retaliation against the first settlements. The only voices raised against Indian slavery were those of the donatários, who complained that the actions of these slave traders were ruining the chances for their colonies' success. In 1546, Pero de Góis, the donatário of Paraíba do Sul, described to the king the slave trading of one Henrique Luis. According to Góis, Luis imprisoned "an Indian, the greatest chief in this land," on his ship and demanded a large ransom from the chief's people for his safe return. The chief's people paid the ransom, but Luis broke his word and, "in order to ingratiate himself with other Indians," gave the chief as a prisoner to them. After this deception, the chief's people attacked and destroyed one of the Portuguese villages. Góis wrote the king that "they all said many bad things of us, and that they did not trust us, and that we don't keep our word." Similarly, in the same year, Duarte Coelho, the donatário of Pernambuco, compared those living in the regions south of Pernambuco to pirates, informing the king that they sailed up and down the coast attacking and enslaving Indians. After residing in Brazil only a few months, Nóbrega believed that most of the slaves in Bahia in 1549 had been obtained through such raids.⁴⁹

Unlike the experience in Africa, where Christian evangelism was used as an argument in favor of enslaving Africans, the first Jesuits in Brazil did not advocate enslaving Indians to evangelize them. Nóbrega believed instead that slavery

impeded the mission of the Jesuits to the Indians. He wrote his superior soon after arriving in Brazil that the conversion of the Indians depended on the return of enslaved Indians to their homelands. After a decade in Brazil, Nóbrega echoed Oliveira's arguments when he concluded that the enslavement of Indians by colonists "is not to save them nor for them to know Christ nor for them to live in justice and reason, but to rob them of their farms, their sons, their daughters, and their women." The Jesuits urged instead that the king of Portugal limit Indian slavery in Brazil.⁵⁰

Brazil's first governor and judicial authorities took the first steps to place limits on Indian slavery, by directive of the king, who had decided that slave raiding along the coast of Brazil should no longer be tolerated. In the royal instructions (*regimento*) written for the king's first governor of Brazil in 1548, the king acknowledged that such raiding occurred and outlawed it henceforth. The Crown magistrate subsequently wrote from Brazil to his sovereign that slave raiding was the primary cause of Indian unrest in Brazil and informed the king that he had ordered that Indians seized in this way be liberated. And, in fact, Jesuit Leonardo Nunes escorted a group of Guarani, who had been captured south of São Vicente and sold as slaves in Bahia, back to their homeland in southern Brazil. Nunes wrote that raiding against coastal Indians had largely stopped by 1551, "praised be the name of Our Lord."⁵¹

Following the arrival of the governor and the Jesuits, several basic rules began to be asserted for the regulation of the Indian slave trade. As had happened in Africa, outright raiding was discouraged, and instead, enslavement was to take place through just wars or *resgate*. Both practices had well-established precedents and well-developed arguments to legitimate African slavery; these were soon modified to apply to Brazil.

As we have seen, ransoming (*resgate*) was a familiar custom from the Iberian Reconquest, it was a well-known practice in the Mediterranean, and it had characterized some of the first interactions between Portuguese and North Africans. In Brazil, it took on an added meaning because it was associated with the cannibalistic ceremonies of coastal Tupi groups. Later, cannibalism would be used as an argument in favor of enslaving Indians, but in the beginning, *resgate* was simply a means of obtaining prisoners slated for sacrifice. Through *resgate*, captives held for a cannibalism ceremony were purchased from an Indian group. Since Tupi groups obtained these captives from their intertribal wars and raids, such captives were prisoners of war in the eyes of the Portuguese as well



Figure 6.3. A captive in a cannibalism ceremony. André F. Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique, autrement nommée Amerique* (Paris, 1558). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

as the French. Because the captives were, in the minds of the colonists, already slaves, ransomed captives could then be legally owned as slaves. Moreover, since the prisoners so obtained were rescued from certain death and cannibalism, the Portuguese and the French saw slavery as an act of charity, infinitely better than death through cannibalism. Jean de Léry described how he obtained slaves after the Tupinambá returned from a ferocious battle with the Margaia. They had thirty prisoners with them, reports Léry, and a few days later “our interpreters entreated them to sell some of them to Villegagnon.” Léry himself bought “a woman and a little boy of hers who was less than two years old,” and this purchase “cost me about three francs’ worth of goods.” Léry saw his new slaves as having been “rescued by us out of their [the Tupinambá] hands.”⁵² Depictions of captives, secured by cords, before they were about to be killed for cannibalism ceremonies, appear as illustrations in both Léry’s and Thevet’s works (Fig. 6.3).

At first, the Jesuits accepted resgate as a legitimate means for obtaining slaves, and they saw it as a means of reducing and eventually replacing cannibalism. Léry describes how resgate was already undercutting the traditional Tupinambá ritual of cannibalism. He writes that one of the Tupinambá men told him that since Villegagnon had arrived, "we have scarcely eaten half of our enemies." The man further reflected to Léry, "I don't know what will come of all this." Jesuits capitalized on this moment of change in Indian society and preached to Indians that they must sell captives to the Portuguese as slaves; they even took a direct role in delivering captives to the Portuguese as slaves. A Jesuit priest in Rio de Janeiro, for example, took eight war prisoners from an Indian group and gave them to the Portuguese, who paid for them. Over time, however, Nóbrega had reservations about ransoming, for he doubted that all the slaves he saw around him were truly captives liberated from cannibalistic ceremonies. He thought it more likely that Portuguese colonists manipulated Indians to obtain slaves. Nóbrega echoes Oliveira's criticism of the African slave trade when he writes that most Indians became slaves through "cunning." Nóbrega alludes to such devious practices when he expresses his belief that the Portuguese had "taught" the Indians how to attack each other and sell captives as slaves, or that the Portuguese had "asked" Indian men for women as wives, giving the women's fathers some trading goods, but then kept the women as "slaves forever."⁵³

As in the early days of African slavery, the concept of the just war, the captives of which could be enslaved, became established in Brazil. When the king wrote the royal instructions to his first governor, Tomé de Sousa, he commanded Sousa to inform himself about the Indians who had risen up against Francisco Pereira Coutinho, the deceased (and cannibalized) donatário of Bahia, and who had destroyed *fazendas* and committed other damages. Once he ascertained which Indian groups had rebelled, the king ordered Sousa to "destroy their villages and settlements, killing and capturing those whom you deem sufficient for their punishment."⁵⁴ In essence, this was a just war, and the defeated could legally be enslaved.

So, too, was another just war declared in 1562 by the third governor of Brazil, Mem de Sá, who signed a decree proclaiming that all Caeté Indians would be slaves wherever they were found, with no exceptions. This was in response to the death of Dom Pedro Fernandes Sardinha, first bishop of Brazil, at the hands of the Caeté Indians. Sardinha, who had been so critical of the Jesuit mission in Bahia, had been summoned back to Lisbon by King João III. In 1555, Bishop